THE WINNING OF SARENNE

ST. CLAIR BEALL

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A MAN OF WILD AND FEARFUL ASPECT (*Page 342*)

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By

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With Illustrations
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NEW YORK
The Federal Book Company
1902

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THE WINNING OF SARENNE

CHAPTER I

THE AMBUSH

It was in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The old city of Sarenne was at the height of its splendor. On an afternoon in May a person who stood upon one of the high, forest-clad hills that surrounded the town would have seen a sight of rare beauty in the old gray walls and battlements, bosomed in the blossoming orchards and vineyards.

The glory of the young springtime lay upon the land, and the breeze wafted up a rich perfume that came from a whole valley of flowers. A river, gleaming like a band of silver, flowed through the center of the place, and on to the

westward, where the setting sun illumined its waters.

The scene had been still, except for the faint tolling of the cathedral bell; but when the last knell had died away, and when the sunset lights had almost faded, the observer on the hill might have heard all at once another sound, the strains of a caroling song, coming from the direction where the road to the city wound up through the thick forest.

Each minute it seemed to swell louder and louder, and gradually it mingled with the clatter of horses' hoofs, as two cavaliers came into view far down the hillside.

One of them was an elderly man of quiet demeanor. He was clad in a dress which seemed to indicate that he was lower in rank than his companion, upon whom he kept his eyes fixed continually. The latter wore the gay-colored costume of the period, with even added splendor, as became his youth. He

had a fine, erect figure, and his handsome face was alight with laughter as he rode.

It was he who was singing the merry song that made the forest echo, his head flung back, and his curly brown hair tossing in the breeze. He was mounted upon a superbly caparisoned charger.

When they reached the foot of the hill, his voice broke into a wild laugh, and he turned to his companion, with the words, "One gallop more, Gaston, and the town is ours!"

"Your grace forgets that our horses have traveled hard all day," the man answered with a slight smile; but his warning was lost upon the other, who plunged the spurs into the sides of his steed and galloped up the slope.

As he did so, he leaned forward in his saddle, waving his cap aloft, then turned to glance back at the other, who had followed his lead, and shouted excitedly, "Sarenne, Sarenne!"

So they dashed up to the hilltop and into

view of the beautiful valley; and the young rider reined up his horse and sat drinking in the sight, his arms still stretched out, his chest swelling, and a look of wonder upon his face.

The scene beneath him was just then a glowing mass of color in the sunset light; but it was not of this the rider thought. When he spoke, his voice was almost a whisper, and full of awe.

"Gaston," he said, "it is really Sarenne!"

And again he stood watching the picture below him, his glance straying from the fields to the river, and from the river to the town.

"Home!" he muttered. "Home again!" and turned once more to his friend, speaking swiftly in his joy.

"Think of it, Gaston," he cried, "seven long years! Seven years I have dreamed of this picture, and counted the days until I might see it again. And all my life has been lived in the thought of it—my one wish in the

world has been for this hour! And here I am, Gaston; the time has come!"

A lump seemed to rise in the young man's throat and choke him; he stretched wide his arms and drank in a deep breath.

The other replied slowly, "The victory is still to be won, your grace, before it is time to rejoice"; but the other only laughed as he turned to the view again.

"I have not asked for the victory," he exclaimed eagerly; "I asked only for the chance —for the chance! And it is here!"

He looked almost as if he wished to spur his horse straight down the steep hill to the distant town, but he checked his impatience with the words: "We must wait for night, I suppose—for night! But it is hard; it seems as if I ought not to delay an instant more; as if what I feel in my heart just now could sweep an army before it."

"It will not sweep Duke Raymond's walls," said the other, whereat the young man turned

upon him impetuously, with the exclamation: "Call him not Duke Raymond, Gaston! Call him by his name—call him knave!"

"I did but speak in the world's fashion," the other replied. "Your grace must——"

"If I cared for the world's fashions and the world's ways, I would not be here now," the other answered; and then, dropping the subject, he turned and gazed once more at the evening landscape.

When he went on, it was in a much lower tone.

"Gaston," he said, "do you remember the last time we saw this scene? Before God, it has burned itself into my memory with its own fire, and all through these years, whenever I thought of Sarenne, it has been as it was that night.

"Do you remember how we galloped up this hill, and how I made you stop here where we stand—while I looked back at the blazing city and thought how I was leaving behind

me, in the wreck of it, all that had ever been dear to me in life? Can you guess what was in my heart that fearful night—the shame and the helpless rage of the poor outcast boy?

"There was no fear; I don't think I could have thought of such a thing as fear. I know if it had not been for you I should have gone back, straight back into that trap of death, just for one chance to fling myself at the throat of that traitor. I remember how in the afternoon, after my father's murder, I had hid in the house where you took me, and looked through the shutters and saw Black Raymond ride by in his hateful triumph, his sword still red with the blood of those he had slain, and with his hirelings at his back.

"Gaston, I was mad with the horror of that impotence—mad that I was forced to crouch there as a child and see that brutal villain with his savage, exultant face, knowing that he had wrecked everything good and beautiful that

my life had ever owned, knowing that I was a hunted wretch, a fugitive from my own city because of him! And he, too, who had been my father's trusted soldier, who had kissed my hand in fawning humility, and trembled at my threats!

"Ah, Gaston, perhaps it is not well to hate so, but the figure of Black Raymond, as I saw him that day with my father's crown upon his head, has lived with me like a nightmare; and all my life has come to be but a consecration to my vengeance. When I practised at sword play with you, it was because some day I must meet Black Raymond, because treason and crime were triumphant upon earth, and because my father's voice cried out to me night and day.

"You know that, Gaston, as well as I, you who have guarded me and trained me and taught me to live for that high duty; and now that I am here, you must know what is in my heart—now, when Sarenne lies before my eyes

at last, and the hour of the struggle is almost at hand."

The young man stood for a moment, straining forward in the saddle, his face alive with his ever-growing excitement.

"Ah," he cried, "I am half drunk with this passion of mine; is it a kind of madness more than wine or love? It is as if I had nothing to do but lose all my soul in it, fling my whole being loose in the struggle! And I feel as if I could sweep everything before me, as if the very towers of that town would feel my will."

The older man was watching the other's eagerness with joy and pride, but he answered gravely: "Your grace must be prepared for either success or failure."

The other looked at him a moment and then asked: "Gaston, do you remember Quentin de Tours, and that day he called me coward? You remember that even you tried to argue with me, to tell me that he was an old warrior and I but a boy; tried to use

even my duty to my father and Sarenne, to make me traitor to myself; but there was a voice at my heart that told me it was better to live not at all than to live weakly—that I had to make that man bend the knee before me, or never raise my head again.

"And here is the same issue once more. Geoffrey of Sarenne is the lord of Sarenne, and nowhere else will he live for one instant; and he will be master of his own, or spend the last drop of his blood in the trial. When Black Raymond has killed me, he may hold what he has and rest at ease; but I shall have one chance at him first!"

The young rider sat for a moment more with his hands clenched, and with a grim look upon his face, as he gazed at the defiant battlements.

Then he laughed excitedly again and added: "And, Gaston, even if I fail, it will have been worth the trying! Do you think that this horse of mine would not joy in the risk if I

spurred him down yon hill, that he would not know what it meant, and feel his heart leap for the battle? Is it not something to taste the glory of one's faculties, to live at the top of one's being just once, and drink the cup of life while it glows? And what I have I shall owe to myself, and to none other—it will be the more glorious because I alone have mastered it."

Geoffrey paused for a moment, and then his companion, to whose more matter-of-fact mind other thoughts were suggested by his eager words, made answer: "Your grace will not be without help; there is no man in Sarenne who does not hate Black Raymond."

"Thou hast no mind for poetry, Gaston," said the other, with a laugh; but then, his thoughts following the new train of ideas, he added, after a pause:

"It is a kind of consecration to me, it lifts my work beyond the thought of my own self and my rights—when I think of Sarenne, and

what it bears from that tyrant. Oh, I did not say much, but those tales that they brought me of Raymond's cruelty were like fire in the blood to me! The man holds his power by the sword, and fierceness is his only safety."

"People say that it is the mercenaries that he must needs keep, his Germans, who are the cause of most of the outrages. And then that son of his, Prince Armand——"

"Speak not his name!" cried Geoffrey. "I can see that hated face before me now—the lying knave that he is! Gaston, I thought that even as a boy no greater scoundrel ever lived; and what I have heard of him since has but made me hate him more, until his face has come to haunt me like a nightmare."

"Prince Armand's face must have changed much since you saw him," replied the other. "He is a stalwart trooper now, and leader of his father's soldiers; though I have heard that he hates Black Raymond as much as the rest of the world."

"Ay," said Geoffrey, "but he is of the wolf's breed, and he will fight with the pack. He has fought already, it seems, until his name is a terror to all Sarenne. Sometimes I have wondered if the best way a man could deal with such an enemy were not to treat him as men say he treated young St. Just and stab him while he slept. But it cannot be much longer, and I tell you that when the thought comes to me of crossing swords with Armand, I can scarcely keep my hands still."

The other had been eagerly watching his young master, whose face was still flushed, and whose eyes were still gleaming; but now he laid his hand gently upon his arm and said: "Your grace, they are long years that we have lived in this purpose of ours—they meant much labor and much pain for me."

"Yes," said Geoffrey, wondering at the unexpected turn; "I shall never forget——"

"It is not that, your grace," the other said; "it is only that I still claim the right to guide

you; that you must not bring about failure now when I am so near success. No man is more proud of your bravery than I, or less afraid of Raymond and his brat; but your father was brave, and still they rule Sarenne.

"To face those two alone would be nothing, your grace, but they have their horde of soldiers, and there is no chance for us in the world but in matching them in cunning as well as in courage—in keeping hidden until the men of your city know of your presence and are ready at the hour of battle. Your grace must see as well as I that in case Raymond should discover our presence in Sarenne before that time there is no power on earth that could save us."

"I am not quite so much in awe of the man as that," said Geoffrey grimly. But then, a moment afterward, he added, thoughtfully: "Perhaps though, Gaston, you are wiser than I, as usual; but my recklessness is only in my words."

"Your grace would insist upon riding upon the highway," answered the other in matter-of-fact fashion, and without seeming to see the young man's slight smile. "Surely that was more than words."

To which Geoffrey answered with a good-natured laugh and the remark: "I suppose I must move off straightway if you are to be happy?"

"It would surely be best, your grace," said the cautious Gaston gravely, at the same time putting his own horse quickly in motion. He had many times before been glancing about him nervously. "We have several hours to wait, you know, and there is always danger of our being recognized; more important yet——"

"You really think that Raymond has information as to our coming?" put in Geoffrey, anticipating his words.

"I can scarcely think otherwise," was the reply. "We know well that the man dreads

you as his one great foe—he were a fool if he did not. The good Duke Charles often told me he was incurring Raymond's enmity because he took us to live with him; and that your life was never out of danger from his spies. Our own friends in Sarenne have written that Raymond knew of all your actions; and do you think that our weak effort to veil our purposes by a false destination have blinded him as to the meaning of our departure?"

As the two were speaking, they dismounted from their horses and led them into the concealment of the dense bushes at one side. There they seated themselves upon the ground, and after some thought Geoffrey went on, speaking instinctively in a lower voice.

"Do you think, Gaston," he asked, "that old Ducluys will have taken sufficient care to keep my presence a secret?"

"He dwells in the midst of the danger,"

was the answer; "he ought to know it far better than we. He surely showed no lack of caution in the instructions he sent me."

"It was at ten we were to meet him, was it not?" the other said.

"At ten, by the great oak in the clearing on the north hillside. And he warned me especially that we must be prompt, or else wait until the next night; for Raymond is a jealous tyrant, and it is not easy to get his permission to pass in and out of the city after nightfall."

"I suppose Ducluys will invent some good excuse," said Geoffrey. "But do you think that he will undertake to take us into Sarenne in company with him? There will be danger of Raymond's suspecting, and surely——"

"I know not what Ducluys' plans may be, your grace," put in the other; "I thought it best to leave all the arrangements in his hands. He is old and wary, and he knows

his opponent well; nor can there be any doubt of his faithfulness."

"No," replied Geoffrey, with a slight smile; "at least, I can trust old Ducluys."

"If ever there were such a thing as trust upon earth," said the other. "Ducluys was your father's councillor, and your father's father's before him. And his loyalty is the very breath of his being; I do not believe that he could die until the rightful heir of Sarenne was upon the throne."

"God grant that his loyalty may be rewarded," added the young man. "He has surely suffered enough because of his faithfulness to me."

He sat for a few moments in silence, then stood up and gazed about him at the shadowy forest.

His companion was just remarking that it would be well to make their way to the place of rendezvous, when he was interrupted by the sound of horses' hoofs upon the road be-

hind them. He anxiously warned his young master to be silent, and the two crouched in the concealment of the bushes.

The twilight had been gathering rapidly, and it was almost dark as Geoffrey peered out; he could not see the approaching men, but he could make out from the hoof-beats that there were two riders coming swiftly up the hillside in the direction of Sarenne.

They swept nearer, and finally galloped past him, and then it was possible for him to distinguish the features of the newcomers, one of whom was a man not much older than himself, a finely built and well-mounted cavalier, and the other a gray-bearded servitor.

As they passed him, Geoffrey gave a sudden start, and only the alertness of his friend kept him from springing from his hiding place.

"St. Benedict!" he whispered eagerly. "Did you not know that face, Gaston? Surely there can be no mistaking it! It was

Ducluys' own son, Victor, as sure as I live! What can that mean?"

"He was sent away to Paris at your father's death," was the answer, "until Black Raymond's wrath at the family should cool. No doubt he has been notified of your grace's return."

"By our Lady," exclaimed Geoffrey, "Ducluys has been looking far ahead!"

"He must mean to meet him to-night at the same time he meets us," put in the other; and at the word Geoffrey sprang suddenly forward to the road.

"We were fools," he exclaimed, "not to join him. Gaston, why did you stop me?"

The other protested again; but all discussion was ended in an instant by a new happening, one which caused the two men to start back and stare at each other in horror.

From the road below them, shadowed as it was in the darkness of the forest, suddenly

came the sound of a shot, followed by shouts and the clash of weapons.

Geoffrey gave a cry and leaped to his horse.

"An ambush!" he exclaimed; "an ambush! Forward, Gaston—mount!"

But the man had leaped to Geoffrey's bridle.

"Your grace," he cried swiftly, "stop, be wise! You know not what risk you may run, and your life is precious!"

But the blood had leaped to the young man's face, and his war-horse, which had heard the sounds, was no more wild with eagerness than he.

"Gaston," he cried, in a new voice of command, "back from that bridle and mount! Know you not that there is but one enemy? This is Raymond's ambush! And shall I leave my friends to die unaided?"

He plunged his spurs into his already frantic horse, and his companion was compelled to spring aside for his life; then, with a wild shout of "Rescue!" Geoffrey whipped

his sword from its scabbard and swept down the hillside at whirlwind speed.

The fighting was not very far ahead, and it was only a few seconds more—Geoffrey had just time to hear the hoof beats of his friend's horse behind him—when he came within sight of the scene.

It was too dark for him to distinguish anything except a group of struggling forms in the road. He could not have reined up his madly galloping horse had he tried, and he charged straight toward the center of the crowd, his sword raised and his whole body quivering with excitement.

But the wild race ended with still wilder suddenness, for Geoffrey had almost reached the shadowy mass when suddenly three flashes of light shot out into the darkness; there came at the same instant the crash of three pistols, and the young man felt a stinging pain in his left arm.

At the same time his horse plunged to its

knees, hurling its rider forward as if shot from a catapult.

A moment later, as the two struck the ground with a heavy crash, and as Gaston, spurring his horse madly, bore down upon the scene, the figures in the road turned and vanished into the forest, swiftly and without a sound.

CHAPTER II

THE CREEPING FORMS

The faithful Gaston had been only a few yards behind his master; the third bullet indeed had whistled past his head.

As he saw what happened, his heart gave a throb of horror; and so lost was he in the one thought of the other's safety that he heeded not in the least what the other men were doing—it would have been the same, even if they had not fled.

He reined in his horse upon its haunches, leaping swiftly to the ground; and then, while the animal, mad with excitement, galloped off down the road, he rushed over and flung himself down on his knees beside his young master.

The latter lay silent, stunned by the fall. Gaston felt the blood pouring from his arm,

and as he had no means of telling where the wound was, he was beside himself with anxiety.

Once, indeed, the thought flashed over him that their assailants might attack them again, and, taking his master bodily in his arms, he sprang into the concealment of the thicket on the opposite side of the road from that on which they had vanished. Here, for a moment or two, he knelt, frantically searching for Geoffrey's wound, and striving to make sure that he was in possession of life.

In the ditch beside him was water from a recent rain, and the man flung this upon the other's face. It soon caused him to open his eyes, and then Gaston set to work tearing up his mantle to bind up the injured arm, having made sure that the wound was only in the flesh.

"Be still, your grace," he whispered, as Geoffrey strove to rise. "It was a fearful fall, but, praise God, it was no worse."

The young man's head was reeling, and everything seemed to dance before him; but a vague memory of what had happened still haunted him, and he would not be quiet.

"Raymond's men?" he panted. "Have they fled? What——"

"They are gone," replied Gaston; "or, at any rate, it seems so."

"And Victor?" exclaimed the other. "Victor?"

"I do not know what has become of him yet," said Gaston; "but your grace must lie still—your head is bleeding. I thought that all was lost! Oh, why must you——"

"Tush!" muttered Geoffrey, to whom every instant brought clearer consciousness of the situation, "that is nothing! But Victor —he may be wounded—he may still need help. Where are we, Gaston?"

He lifted himself to a sitting posture with a violent effort and gazed about him.

"The road is just beside us," whispered

Gaston. "The enemy has fled apparently, whoever they may have been."

"It was Raymond," muttered the other impatiently; "no one else would do such a thing. Quick, let us see what has happened!"

"It may have been but a feint, their leaving," said Gaston cautiously, "and then——"

"Quick!" was Geoffrey's impatient cry. "If they have done their work, they have gone; they had no quarrel with us."

He strove to rise, with the result that Gaston straightway sprang out into the road to face the danger himself. It was no holiday task to stand upon the open highway beside that black forest; but the man was used to danger, and he bent down and set calmly about ascertaining the state of affairs.

Three horses lay writhing in their death agony, and beside them lay the body of a man, the old servitor, with a bullet through his head. Beyond that, to Gaston's surprise, there was nothing to be seen, though there

was still enough twilight left for him to make out the shadowy forms.

He searched carefully, however, both on the road and beside it, and found no trace of Victor Ducluys. Emboldened by the fact that the forest was still silent, he even plunged into its shadows to continue his search there, but to no purpose.

At last, in answer to Geoffrey's anxious inquiry, he called out that it was certain that the assailants had taken their other victim with them.

When Gaston returned to the road, he found that his friend had staggered out and was examining the body of the murdered man.

"Gaston," he exclaimed excitedly, "he was killed instantly, so the fighting must have been done by Victor! They may have taken him alive!"

There was something fearful and uncanny about the suddenness with which the murder

had been done, and the speed with which the assailants had vanished; but Geoffrey was not thinking of that.

"Gaston," he cried, "they cannot have gone far yet, and Victor may be rescued! Forward, before it is too late!"

The other, thinking as usual of nothing but his young companion's safety, tried to dissuade him. But his arguments were not even heard by Geoffrey, who tore himself away and plunged into the thicket.

But there was another circumstance which kept him quite as effectively from incurring any danger—the fact that he could not find the least trace of the enemies whom he sought.

It was too dark to track them in the forest, and there was no sound to guide him in the pursuit; they had vanished completely with their victim, and Geoffrey's attempts at rescue had soon become but a blind rushing about in the darkness.

Before long, therefore, he was standing out

upon the road once more with his friend, weakened and dazed by loss of blood and vexed at his failure, but chiefly awed at the tragedy he had witnessed.

"It was fearful, Gaston," he muttered; "it passed so swiftly it seems hardly to be true."

"It must serve to remind your grace once more with what kind of an enemy you have to deal," said Gaston, with a shudder. "Surely all the caution we possess will no more than match such ruthlessness as that. Perhaps we ourselves would have met with that fate had we gone on before."

"No," rejoined the other, "I think it likely that Raymond had tidings of Victor's coming; but it will be ghastly news to tell old Ducluys; I know not how he can bear it."

Fearful as it was, however, the murder served one purpose in that it made Geoffrey more awake to his peril, and glad to be as cautious as Gaston could wish.

His head was still reeling, but he leaned

upon Gaston's arm, and after they had made still more certain that Victor was nowhere to be found, they started slowly through the thicket to the place of rendezvous.

They no longer had their horses, and it was fortunate that their goal was not more than half a mile distant; the young man was almost exhausted as it was by the time they at last sank down near the spot, a great oak tree that stood in a little clearing, covered with scattered bushes and furze.

"There is nothing to do now but wait," whispered Gaston; "we have more than an hour."

Geoffrey sat in silence, brooding over the fearful scene he had witnessed, picturing to himself his friend riding joyously homeward after his seven years' absence, to be suddenly overwhelmed with so fearful a fate.

Then he thought of old Ducluys, the father.

"Gaston," he whispered, "it is his last son. And the other died in our cause also!"

"No man can be sure that he is dead, your grace," the man answered after a moment's silence. "He disappeared when your father was slain——"

"He disappeared into Raymond's dungeons," said Geoffrey abruptly, "where this one, too, will disappear. But if I ever open those dungeons, as God may some day grant me to do, I shall be much surprised if there be aught to give back to Ducluys but the bones of his two noble sons. If there be in all Sarenne only a hundred men who have as much rage and desperation in their hearts as old Ducluys, I think there will be no doubt of Black Raymond's fate!"

The young man sat for a long time with that grim thought in his mind; but then, as his fancy swept on, he spoke again, in a gentler voice:

"He has but one heart left in the world to cherish, poor old Ducluys. Gaston, do you remember the beautiful Marguerite? It seems

to me I can still see her as a little girl, the petted darling of my father's court. I remember how she soothed me on that fearful day of Raymond's treachery, and I remember how she wept when I left. Have you had any tidings of Marguerite, Gaston?"

"The messenger whom Ducluys last sent me said that Marguerite is still as fair as she was then," the other replied. "But I fear, your grace, that Sarenne will be no place for women in the next few days—nor even for thoughts of women."

Geoffrey answered nothing to the remark; he sat for a while lost in his own reveries, until at last his thoughts moved away to the distant city again.

He gazed ahead to where the valley, now shrouded in darkness, lay open before them, a few twinkling lights gleaming faintly through the slowly rising mist.

It was a strangely mysterious scene; the stillness of night lay about the two, and the

stars gazed down upon them, and the world seemed very vast indeed.

Geoffrey was awed by the scenes he had passed through, as well as by the solemn purpose in his heart, and all his soul was hushed.

It was only once that his mood was broken, by the far-off tolling of the cathedral bell; the two counted it—it rang nine strokes—and then Gaston whispered, "We have just an hour!"

After which silence again settled about them.

And so they sat, they knew not how long, each half aware of his own thoughts and half of the place about him, until suddenly Geoffrey gave a start and laid his hand, trembling with eagerness, upon his companion's.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered. "Did you?"

"Some one is coming," was Gaston's swift reply, and the two again became silent; this time, however, crouching with every sense

upon the alert, like wild deer of the forest at the hounds' first cry.

It was only a second more before Geoffrey whispered: "I hear footsteps! They are coming!" and laid his ear to the ground.

There could be no mistaking then—there were horses trampling in the forest, and the two men lay with hearts beating from excitement.

The sound came nearer and nearer. Geoffrey had even raised himself and was peering about to get a first glimpse of the arrivals, when suddenly he heard Gaston whisper, "The men have stopped!"

And, sure enough, everything was silent again, all the more silent for the contrast; the younger man crouched, burning with impatience, while a minute passed—two minutes—and still the sounds were heard no more.

"Gaston," he muttered suddenly, half starting to rise, "they must mean not to come any closer; we ought to go——"

But his friend caught his arm with sudden fierce energy.

"No, no," he whispered, swiftly. "No!"

"Why not?" Geoffrey exclaimed; and the man answered: "The place was here, and they will come here if it be Ducluys. Let us wait."

And he drew his friend down yet closer into the shadows of the bushes, for at that moment Gaston noticed what before in his eagerness he had not perceived, that far over the valley, behind the distant hills, a golden moon had been slowly creeping into view, shaking itself clear from the mists of the valley.

Now its light was streaming down upon the clearing, so that the gnarled oak tree stood out like some giant presence.

The two were close to a few tangled bushes, where they crouched and watched and wondered; for not two minutes passed, but two more, and five, and then ten, and still there came no sound, and no motion.

The surface of the pale moon itself could not have been more still than the clearing about them, until something happened which caused Geoffrey to clutch his friend's arm in a grip like steel, while every muscle in his body suddenly grew rigid.

Gaston stared at him in consternation, until he saw that his eyes were fixed upon a certain spot at the side of the clearing—to which Gaston himself turned like a flash.

For a moment he saw nothing, but then, as the shadows of the place became clearer to his eyes, he made out something that caused his blood to leap no less wildly than Geoffrey's.

It was not fifty feet away from them, and clearly to be seen in the moonlight, so there could be no doubt. Something was moving there!

And then, slowly, and inch by inch, as the two knelt and gazed in consternation, out from the low-lying bushes, across an open space in the moonlight, and to another bush

beyond, crept a form, lying flat upon the ground—the form of a man!

From that instant there was but one sight in the world for the two watchers: they saw no longer the broad clearing with its moonlight shadows, no longer the starry sky or the misty landscape or the towering oak—they saw only that gliding figure.

Was it one of Ducluys' men, intending to take no risks, but to see Geoffrey before being seen? Was it Victor Ducluys, wounded and hunted and seeking the rendezvous? "But at least if it be an enemy," Geoffrey found himself thinking, "he does not know of us."

The man was not coming in their direction, but was stealing on as silently as ever toward the clearing and the oak tree.

At last, in the midst of a tiny copse of furze, he stopped altogether; and, though Geoffrey craned his neck, he saw him no more. The long seconds of suspense crept

by, leaving only one thing clear in the minds of his watchers, that he was a person who knew of the rendezvous.

The two lay there, burning with excitement, until all at once Geoffrey clutched his friend's wrist again and showed him, as he turned, another gliding form.

It came from a place a little beyond, so there could be no doubt about its being another man. He came just as cautiously, stealing from one black shadow to another, anon lifting his head and listening, and then going on.

The two watchers were thinking for their lives now, for they saw that this could be no trifling matter, and that every second was precious. Of the three hypotheses the one concerning Victor was no longer tenable; and why should Ducluys have sent *two* men to watch for Geoffrey?

It seemed that it must surely be the enemy; and at the very instant that Geoffrey had

made that decision there came another figure, moving a little more swiftly, from the same place as the first, while at the same time a slight rustling called his attention to yet a fourth man behind his back, creeping apparently to a spot not far from Geoffrey's own hiding place.

He was still staring about him, confused for a moment by this sudden awakening of the midnight forest to life, when Gaston touched his arm and showed him over on the far edge of the clearing several more dark forms, scarcely distinguishable, but just in the act of crouching down and beginning their silent advance.

It was hard to count after that, for the sudden discovery of their strange situation had almost dazed the two. To see all around them these mysterious figures, gliding as if moved all by one unseen force toward the center of the clearing; to know, moreover, that they were all seeking dark shadows to

crouch in, and that any man of them might choose the place where the two were hiding!

For a moment, at any rate, Geoffrey found it too much for his thoughts; it left him quite confused and helpless—until all at once there came a lightning flash that rent the clouds of his brain, and showed him clear as daylight the truth about this ghostly affair.

Perhaps the moonlight in one place was brighter, or one man less careful; at any rate, Geoffrey felt a trembling hand clutch his arm so tightly that he winced, and felt Gaston's panting breath stealing closer to his ear; then at last, in a sound not so loud as the night breeze rustling a leaf, he heard five words that made his whole being leap up within him:

"I—saw—a—green—coat!"

And now, Geoffrey of Sarenne, the hour of your fate was at hand! The first card of the great game of your life is played, your enemy has made his move, and you have time—perhaps one minute, perhaps a dozen—no one

can tell you that—to guess his hand, to beat him if you can!

The issue of it is life and death, you understand; for these men are veterans of fifty camps, and when they strike, they strike to kill; and, besides that, they are fiends—if they were not they would not be Duke Raymond's bodyguards, as they are.

It was a simple problem, after all. Perhaps only a coward would have been confused by it; and Geoffrey was no coward—the very imminence of the peril, the very clearness of the issue, roused his soul to new powers, and made his brain clear and swift.

These were enemies then! And evidently, therefore, there had been a traitor, and everything from first to last was known to Black Raymond.

And he had bagged part of his game, and had come for the rest; he had made quite sure of them, too, had his trap all ready; and no one who got into it would be apt ever to

get out—by any of this world's gates, at any rate.

Raymond had come to win, and no doubt he had men enough for his purpose.

Besides that there was for Geoffrey only one other fact to consider—that at the present moment his friends were, no doubt, well on their way into the trap, that it was only a question of minutes before they would be there altogether.

And as for himself, he was in it already.

And to get out of it? The thing might be done, he thought, if it were done quickly, before the fatal sound of Ducluys' horses was heard.

But then one by one the difficulties of the attempt rose up before him. The place about them swarmed with their enemies, and no doubt there were many more hidden in the thicket beyond; and, though these men were just then used to seeing forms creeping about, they were only used to seeing them creep in

one direction, while Geoffrey and his companion would have to go in the other—to say nothing of the fact that Geoffrey's clothing was red instead of green.

Moreover, though there were bushes and dark shadowed places which might screen them from view, it was no longer possible for them to tell which of these places were already occupied by their enemies.

There was another plan, of course—a dash for the woods.

A man with a wounded arm and a weakened body is not apt to dash far, especially when he has no destination for his dash; but Geoffrey's quick judgment decided none the less for that attempt, and he had already begun to lift his head and nerve his limbs for the spring—his companion, of course, understanding him and preparing to follow—when suddenly a new thought flashed over him, and he sank down, crouching lower than ever.

This time his mind had been too swift for

his friend's, and after a few seconds of waiting he felt the latter's breath creeping toward him again, and heard, or rather felt, so low was it spoken in his ear, the question:

"What are you going to do?"

Geoffrey answered no less softly, "I am going to stay!"

For a moment Gaston was quite breathless; he strove to think, but he could not.

"Stay?" he gasped. "In Raymond's trap?"

"Raymond need never know we are in it!" whispered Geoffrey grimly.

"But Ducluys?" panted the other, more astounded than ever. "Ducluys will come!"

"Let him come," said Geoffrey, and he caught the other's wrist with a gesture of command. "Let him come; this trap is not for Ducluys!"

Gaston took a few seconds to meditate upon this statement, which became clear to him, little by little.

Raymond had Ducluys at his mercy at any time, and the reason for all this cunning was to take a far more important prisoner than he. If Ducluys came and Geoffrey did not appear, to be sure Raymond might shoot if he chose—but, then, how would he get Geoffrey? It looked very much like standing in front of a cannon and calculating the chances—it is probably not loaded—the powder is wet at any rate—so, therefore, we will wait and see; but Geoffrey determined to risk it none the less.

To attempt to escape now meant almost certain discovery, and discovery meant almost certain death. And, therefore, they would stay and watch; and Ducluys would ride into Raymond's trap, and then ride out of it again, and the danger would be over.

Geoffrey lay breathless, listening to the wild throbbing of his heart against the earth and letting his eye wander about the scene, where all the moving had ceased now, and where the

landscape lay hushed and silent, sleeping in the silver moonlight.

It was fearful to look at it and know that while it seemed so quiet, it was charged with throbbing passion; that while all appeared so fair, the place was hideous with murder and destruction. Geoffrey's glance moved from one part of the breathless scene to another; that dark shadow just in front of him was a crouching assassin; that thing which moved the bushes was the foot of another.

And then suddenly—that clanging sound, that to the tense senses of the two watchers came like the roaring of the wreck of things—what was *that?*

Oh, that was the bell of the Sarenne cathedral, tolling abroad the tidings that the hour was at hand!

And everything about the place seemed to grow tenser at the signal; Geoffrey's head was upraised, his eyes staring, his ears on the alert; and it seemed as if all Raymond's

troopers were doing the same thing from their hiding places, as if the very trees round about were stretching forward—until suddenly, far down the slope, was heard the neighing of a horse, the faint thud of hoofs, and the far-off sound of voices, telling to all that Ducluys was coming—that the moment of peril was at hand.

CHAPTER III

A HAZARD AT EVERY TURN

THE sounds upon the hillside proved to be no false alarm. Every moment the trampling of horses' hoofs became louder, and Geoffrey knew instinctively that the riders were his friends.

He darted one swift glance about the clearing; everything lay still as death, the men crouching so flat upon the ground that even the two watchers could scarcely see them.

Geoffrey felt his friend's hand clutched about his wrist. It was a moment of fearful strain for the two; it seemed almost more than human nerves could stand.

Only once the silence was broken, as Gaston whispered, under his breath as before, "Suppose they attack?"

"They will not attack," was Geoffrey's

answer; but he was far from feeling as certain as he seemed.

Meanwhile the crisis swept near with relentless swiftness.

The men's voices were soon distinct—it seemed fearful to hear one of them laugh, to those who knew the truth about the peril to which they were coming.

Only a few seconds more and the first sign of them could be seen, a man upon horseback pushed out of the thicket and into the light of the moon. He was still some distance away, and Geoffrey saw one of Raymond's assassins lift his head an inch or two to peer around.

There came a warning hiss, however, and the head dropped down again, while at the same time five or six more horsemen followed the first.

They came swiftly up the slope, talking to each other as they came. It was only a few seconds more before they had ridden boldly

out into the clearing and reined up their horses to gaze about them.

They were not fifty feet away from Geoffrey, and almost as easily to be recognized as in the full light of day; they could have heard him had he whispered, or seen him had he raised a hand—yet there he lay, and peered out at them, as silent as the bushes at his side.

The man who had ridden at the head of the party was old Philippe Ducluys himself, a man of at least seventy years, with silver beard, but form still erect and firm in the saddle.

Geoffrey could see the gleam of his deep browed eyes, and he recognized an old familiar voice as the man spoke, exclaiming impatiently: "Pierre, they are not here. What can it mean?"

Pierre Deschamps, master of Ducluys' household ever since Geoffrey and even Geoffrey's father could recall, did not answer

the question, but rode quickly to a little hillock, from which he could see in the direction of the road.

"No sign of them, your worship," he said. "'Tis very strange."

Both the old man and his master seemed to be not a little disappointed and vexed. This meeting had been planned and looked forward to by the latter for many weeks, and he had ridden up the slope with his hopes high.

He sat for a moment staring about him, knitting his brows, and then said, clenching his hand upon his bridle angrily: "Strange indeed, Pierre; I know not what to think of their delay. And a miserable failure! I know not if we can get so fair a chance again. To be sure, we cannot blame Geoffrey, for he had far to travel; but my son—certainly there is no reason why Victor should not be here!"

Pierre had come back and joined the others.

"Could anything have happened to him, your worship?" he asked in a low tone.

"Happened to him!" echoed the other. "I had no such thought. He has no enemy in the world except Raymond, and Raymond knows nothing of his coming. I know not what to think."

Old Pierre was silent for a moment, and then he said, "Perhaps they will come yet."

"No," said Ducluys slowly, "the hour has already struck; there is nothing for us to do but to come to-morrow; and yet we might give them a few moments, Pierre; it will do no harm."

The old man dropped his head and sat in silence waiting, while Geoffrey wondered if he could possibly fail to hear the fearful throbbing of his heart.

It was almost unbearable to lie there thus and wait, in the midst of that den of wild beasts, with so terrible a tragedy hanging by a thread above them.

He thought of Black Raymond. Surely

Raymond was somewhere about the place—Raymond, the assassin and usurper, the man whose life had been violence and murder, to whom self-restraint was a word unknown; and he pictured what must be the state of Raymond's mind, the rage at being baffled in all his hopes, in having the man who impudently defied him standing before him in the very act of his defiance.

The perspiration stood out upon Geoffrey's face. *Could* he let him go—could his soldiers do it, hellhounds that they were?

At least, it could not be long now; Geoffrey lay with his whole soul hanging upon Ducluys. He would have given an arm to have been able to warn him, to have seen him whirl about and gallop down the slope.

But there he sat, motionless and silent, knowing no more of his peril than if he and the stars had really been alone.

And then suddenly Geoffrey's heart gave a leap; Ducluys had raised his head!

"Pierre," he said, "there is no use waiting any longer; we will go."

He turned his horse and started, and Geoffrey knew that the instant had come.

He shot a wild glance about the clearing; the very ground seemed to have leaped into life, to be straining with mad suspense like his own.

Here was a soldier lifted upon his hands staring hungrily; yonder was another, crouching on his knees like a runner waiting for the signal; a man with a blunderbuss was clutching it so that Geoffrey could see the tendons of his hands. His own brain was in a whirl, his breath would hardly come, and the hilt of his sword seemed to burn his hand as he clutched it and waited and watched for the first move to be made.

Such tension as that could not have lasted very long; no man in the place could have borne it; they must have leaped up and cried aloud. There were about ten seconds, during

which Geoffrey's very soul seemed on fire; and then it all passed, like some terror in a dream, for the dreaded signal did not come; and Ducluys and his men rode quietly out of the magic circle and cantered down the hill and vanished in the darkness of the woods; and Geoffrey sank back with a groan.

That the tension of the crowd about him had been nearly as great as his own was proven by the fact that his faintly whispered exclamation was drowned by the sudden outburst that came from the lurking figures the instant their foes were gone.

The last of Ducluys' men had scarcely disappeared before the clearing leaped into life as suddenly as if it had been sown with the dragon's teeth of Cadmus. A perfect swarm of the green-coated warriors disclosed themselves, exclaiming to each other and laughing and stretching their arms with relief.

Geoffrey and his friend were in the midst of a peril nearly as great as before, though

in their relief it was not easy for them to realize it.

What saved them was the fact that it was easier for the troopers to go around the tangled clump of bushes than through it, and that no one had the slightest idea of an enemy's presence.

A great stalwart figure, mounted on a black horse, rode to the center, beneath the oak, where the rest, perhaps some two score altogether, moved to join him.

And Geoffrey could not think of any danger in which he might be after that.

This great burly figure, half a foot higher than any of the other men; this brutal, black-bearded face, alive with energy and with hatred; this harsh, rasping voice, telling well its tale of insolent force—Black Raymond again, the nightmare of Geoffrey's life become real once more, and more hateful than ever.

The young man clutched his sword hilt in-

voluntarily, and his hand shook for the first time that night.

Nor were his feelings lessened as another figure equally tall, though less solidly built, rode jauntily out and joined the other.

"So our game has escaped us for once," he said, with a grim laugh as he joined the men. "'Twas poor sport, father."

"At least," put in another voice quickly, before Raymond had time to reply except with an angry syllable, "your grace will own that it was not my fault."

The words caused the two listeners to start with excitement ten times increased; for all this time they had been haunted by one certainty—that of the traitor; and by one desire, that of learning who he was!

Gaston and Geoffrey were straining forward, striving to pick out the speaker from the crowd.

They found it easy to distinguish his figure; it was below the middle height, and very

stooping, and wrapped in a black mantle. His face was turned from them, but they heard his voice plainly enough, and the same thought flashed over them at the same instant —that they had heard it somewhere before.

"Yes," said Raymond, gruffly; "no one blames you; but are you sure the man we want will be here to-morrow?"

"Most certain, your grace," was the reply. "I heard it from Ducluys' own lips. It was to be certainly either to-night or to-morrow."

"Very well, then, we will be as patient as we can," said the duke. "But you are sure that he will not attempt to enter the city otherwise?"

"It would not make any difference," was the response. "I should know it before many hours."

"And it would not take us very long to ferret him out," put in Prince Armand grimly.

"You have the list of all the conspirators too?" asked the father.

"All, your grace."

"'Tis well done; so we have only to get our hands on this Geoffrey, and then we may bag the whole crew in a day—all in a day!" Raymond's face was uplifted as he spoke, and there was a look of savage triumph upon it; he brought his gloved hand down upon his horse's neck with a thud that made the animal leap, and he snarled with an oath, "And when we get them, by Heaven, we will crush them like *that!*"

There followed a moment of silence, during which the man sat gazing before him, with knit brows; then he started and said in a different tone:

"Come, let us be off; there is no more to look for here; we got one prize to-night, and that is enough. To horse!" In a minute more the entire crowd had made their way over to the opposite side of the clearing,

where their horses were led out to them; before another minute had passed away they were clattering down the hillside.

It was some while before the two men who were left had any other wish than to lie there and gasp for breath and let the wild pulsation of their blood grow calm by degrees.

It seemed scarcely possible that that peril could be actually past; it was hard for Geoffrey to realize that the clearing was not still alive.

When at last he did speak, he whispered to his friend, whereupon the two rose and stole silently away into the depths of the woods, where they sat down again opposite each other.

"Gaston, that spy? Who *is* he?" Geoffrey demanded now.

"I have been racking my brains," the other answered. "I cannot tell. But I know the voice!"

"He was some friend of my father's," ex-

claimed Geoffrey; "that I could have sworn. But how are we to find him—what are we to do?"

"It was a dreadful discovery to make," muttered the other, "almost more than my ears could credit. To think that every smallest point of our plan was known, even all our sympathizers' names in the duke's hands, and a plot to murder us prepared! And did you hear him? He said he heard it all from Ducluys' mouth!"

"It ought to be easy to learn who the man is that could say that!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "He must be one of Ducluys' servants, and Ducluys cannot have left many at home. There is one thing certain—surely this traitor cannot be Ducluys himself!"

"No, your grace, it is not Ducluys."

Geoffrey was silent for a moment, then he said slowly: "It is wonderful, Gaston, how this one chance has saved us, how the tables have been turned; for Raymond had us at his

mercy in everything, and now we have Raymond!"

His friend gave a slight start, and a puzzled look crossed his face.

"We have Raymond?" he asked in a lower tone. "How do you mean, your grace?"

Geoffrey gave a slight laugh.

"Where are your brains, Gaston?" he replied.

"I do not know," the other said, without responding to the smile. "I was so dazed by that fearful suspense——"

"So," said Geoffrey, "I can credit that. But now see: Raymond knows Ducluys; he knows all the conspirators, and he has them all at his mercy; he wants one thing more in the world—he wants me; and he won't get me!"

"To be sure not, your grace, but——"

"Listen," went on Geoffrey. "You understand, of course, we shall steal into Sarenne to-night."

"Into Sarenne to-night!" gasped the other.

"Of course," laughed Geoffrey. "Why not? And then we go to Ducluys' house, and we will arrange it so that nobody, not even his own Pierre, knows that we are there. And then, of course, we may stay there as long as we choose and make what plans we choose, and so long as we keep from Raymond the fact that we are there, we are just as safe as we were at Duke Charles' court! Is that not simple, Gaston?"

It was so simple that Gaston was completely taken aback by the thought, and sat with a look of wonder and delight upon his face.

"But the spy, your grace?" he objected suddenly. "How can we be sure——"

"We will be sure prĕtty soon," said Geoffrey, grimly; "and, besides, a spy is a very handy thing when you know about him. We can use the spy, you know, to make Raymond believe simply anything we choose."

Gaston had only one more objection to

make before being completely overwhelmed by the possibilities of the situation.

"How can we get into Ducluys' house?" he asked anxiously.

But Geoffrey merely interrupted him with a laugh and said: "Leave that to me; my brains have not been scattered by the danger."

Then suddenly he rose quietly.

"Come and let me show you," he added. "But you will have to give me your arm, Gaston; I had almost forgotten my weakness in the excitement."

The two were obliged to walk a mile or so through the dense thickets, and afterward over the moon-lighted meadows, and Geoffrey was very glad to sink down and rest at last, while Gaston with his hunting-knife felled a sapling and lopped off the branches a foot from the trunk to make a ladder for their next adventure.

They forded the river which ran past the city, and were soon crouching near a lonely

part of the wall. Above they could hear the tread of a sentry now and then, and so they waited until the moon was clouded.

If they were discovered at their present task, they might very well escape; but that would be an end to their hold upon Raymond.

When at last a chance arrived, they set the top of their ladder firmly between two projecting stones and sank the bottom a little in the ground.

It was not easy for Geoffrey to climb with his helpless arm, but Gaston lifted him upon his shoulder, and when the sentry had passed again, it did not take him long to clamber high enough to peer over the wall. He found that the coast was clear, and was soon crouching in the shadows.

His friend joined him, and they found to their relief that on the other side a low shed abutted against the wall, making their descent easy.

Geoffrey let himself down and crouched

beside the building, while his friend, as the more agile of the two, prepared for the last and most difficult move of all.

It would, of course, not have done to leave their ladder in full view; they had chosen a place where the bushes were thick enough to hide it if it fell, and Gaston's purpose was to push it free and leap back and down from the wall before the sound should discover him to the sentry. It seemed a very doubtful venture, but, as it proved, their alarms were unnecessary.

Gaston's leap was so swift as to be almost a tumble, but the fall of the ladder was deadened by the bushes, and the sentry apparently did not even hear it. When he came back, it was at his usual monotonous pace.

After that for a time their peril seemed less, for there were few people about at this hour, and it was easy for the two to choose unfrequented streets.

Gaston asked no questions regarding Geof-

frey's destination, though he saw very soon that they did not turn toward Ducluys' own house, which was a great, castle-like stone building, not far from the wall. It was not very long before another turn caused him to give a subdued exclamation which made his friend smile.

"You see now," he said.

"Are you sure that the house is still deserted?" was Gaston's anxious response.

"We must chance that," was the reply. "Certainly Ducluys would not have been apt to sell it."

Presently the two found themselves before a two-story building, the doors and windows of which were closely boarded up. They did not stop, but went swiftly around to the rear, through a narrow alleyway fronting a dead wall, and leading to a court, almost too narrow for any light to reach it.

Here Geoffrey went to one of the windows and pressed his dagger into the sill, causing

what proved to be an iron shutter in disguise to swing inward with a faint creaking sound.

There was no telling what might be in that dark room; but the two had to take such chances as this, and they climbed in and silently closed the shutter behind them.

That left them in utter blackness, but they knew the house well; it had been the last house in Sarenne to shelter Geoffrey, so it made part of the memory of that evening of flight, which was so burned into his brain.

The two men went on, passing through a hallway and then through a trap door to the cellar, about the walls of which, amid a scampering of rats and a splashing of foul water, Geoffrey groped and counted the stones until he found another secret spring.

This moved, by strange devices, first a stone in the wall, and then a heavy door of iron behind it, and disclosed a passage just wide enough for a man's body.

Gaston, who, being free from wounds, insisted upon taking the risks, clambered silently in, and his friend followed him. Then they closed the doors and set noiselessly forward.

It was not pleasant, creeping along in the darkness of that tunnel, regarding the conditions of which for the last seven years neither of them knew anything whatever. There were unpleasant possibilities of pitfalls, to say nothing of enemies.

But they had no way of obtaining a light, and so they pushed grimly on for at least a quarter of a mile, with no worse adventure than a fall or two upon the slimy ground.

At last they arrived at a small stone chamber which marked the end of the tunnel, and which, by another secret door, opened to a staircase scarcely wide enough for a man's body, and so steep as to be little more than a ladder.

It was much like climbing up within a sloping chimney, but the two men apparently

knew their way perfectly, and went swiftly on until they reached the top.

The whole journey had been a fearful one to Geoffrey, and now he sank down gasping for breath; but his companion heard him whisper a moment later in the silence, "Gaston, we are there!"

CHAPTER IV

A VOW OF VENGEANCE

SOME time after, when Geoffrey had rested, he rose again and pressed another secret spring, freeing a door in the wall before him, which he opened inch by inch and very softly.

The opening of it let in a faint light, which seemed much brighter to the two than it really was.

Geoffrey stopped and listened long and carefully. As he heard no sound, he pushed the door wider and peered out through the aperture into a beautifully furnished room, lit by a single lamp.

When the aperture was wide enough to admit his head, he caught sight of something which made him suddenly pause and gaze in breathless silence.

The room was empty but for one person, a

HE STOOD FOR A MOMENT, THEN WHISPERED "MARGUERITE"

girl, seated where the rays of the lamp fell upon her.

It was easy for Geoffrey to recognize the beautiful face—it was Marguerite Ducluys!

The girl was seated with her chin resting in her hands, gazing thoughtfully before her.

She did not see Geoffrey, though he fancied she must hear the very beating of his heart. At last, however, as she did not move, he turned to his friend, motioning him to lie still, and glided out into the room.

He stood for a moment and then whispered "Marguerite!"

The effect of the sound was startling. The girl leaped up with a look of the wildest horror upon her face. Geoffrey could see her bosom heaving as she stared at him, and he feared that she would scream.

"Marguerite!" he whispered again. "Do you not know me?"

The girl had clutched her forehead in her

hands, and was still gazing at him with a wild look of uncertainty.

"Geoffrey!" she panted hoarsely; but then, as he took a step toward her, she leaped back, crying in fear: "Is it you? Is it really you?"

She might well have asked, for Geoffrey himself did not know how much he seemed like some fearful phantom of the night, with his ghastly white face and his blood-stained clothing.

But he answered her: "It is I, Marguerite. I came in by the wall and the tunnel," and the girl's emotions changed from terror to wonder and delight.

"Oh, I could scarcely believe my eyes!" she exclaimed. "Father will be so relieved!" Then, as Geoffrey sank down in a chair, she sprang to him, exclaiming, "You are wounded!"

"It is nothing," answered Geoffrey, rousing himself with an effort, and gazing about him. "Are we alone?"

"Yes," was the answer, and Geoffrey whispered to his friend to come out.

Then he bade the girl lock the door for safety, and, when she returned to him, he went on rapidly: "You must listen and do what I say exactly; it is a matter of life and death. Is your father back?"

The girl answered in the affirmative.

"You must go to him quickly," continued the other, "and tell him to come to your room. You must not tell him why on any account, and you must warn him to make no sound when he enters."

And then, as the girl went swiftly to obey, Geoffrey sank back and closed his eyes. His companion, incessantly vigilant as he was, used the short wait that followed to make quite sure that the room contained no hidden listener.

Geoffrey meantime was thinking what he would say to old Ducluys.

In the excitement of the night he had

almost forgotten the fearful piece of news he had to tell him—of Raymond's murder of his son; but he felt now that he could not speak of anything else with that upon his mind.

Accordingly, when Ducluys entered with his daughter, full of surprise and wonder, he waited only until the first greetings and explanations had been exchanged, and then, as gently as he could, he told the two of the cruel scene he had witnessed.

It was dreadful to see the old man's first emotion as he strove to realize the import of Geoffrey's words. He and his daughter stood for several moments staring at each other half dazed; and long after the girl had turned away and buried her face in her hands with a cry of horror, the man continued gazing at Geoffrey like a helpless child.

And when at last he saw from the look upon the other's face that he had really to face the fearful truth, he sank down,

too much overcome to make a single sound.

The moments of silence that followed were awful ones. The younger man was more filled with fear at the sight of that shuddering form than he would have been at the presence of a thousand foes. It seemed like a load of lead lifted from his heart when he heard the girl break out into frantic sobbing.

And a moment later Ducluys started to his feet again; Geoffrey saw that his face was convulsed with rage.

"Scoundrel! Murderer!" he cried hoarsely, raising his clenched fist to the sky. "Oh, God, when shall we have vengeance for such things as these? We have groaned beneath every outrage known to men; we have borne every insult and shame! And now, my son, my son! Oh, I had but two, and one of them has lain for seven years in this tyrant's dungeons! And now this—oh, it is too much, too much!"

The old man sank back upon the bed again, burying his face in his hands, and shaking with his grief.

Then once more he sprang up in wrath, cursing the ruthless cruelty of Raymond, and vowing his life and all he owned to bring about his fall. Half wild with passion, he fell down on his knees before Geoffrey, to implore him for aid, crying out in a choking voice that there was no family in Sarenne that had not some such wrong at its heart; that the whole city was calling for justice.

But while Geoffrey assured him that he meant to conquer or die, the thought of his dead son and that no effort could save him, seemed to overcome the old man once more, and he cowered down again in tears. He remained thus for at least a minute or two, while no one spoke a word; and then slowly the shaking of his frame subsided and all was still except for the sobbing of the girl.

When Ducluys rose slowly to his feet, his

ghastly white face was set in a look that was more like death than life; his outburst was over, and he was master of himself, but it seemed to Geoffrey as if his eyes were fairly on fire when he spoke again.

"My lord," he said, grimly, "we have wasted too much time; it is but one more thing to nerve us to vengeance. And you yourself are wounded, and have, perhaps, more to tell me. You shall no longer be troubled with my grief."

Geoffrey had indeed things to tell, and things that could not be put off; he waited, therefore, only a minute or two longer, until the old man's self-control was more certain, and then went on to relate what had befallen him that night.

"Raymond knew all my plans!" gasped the old man. "He heard them from my own lips!"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, grimly; "he said from your own lips."

Ducluys flung himself on his knees in sudden alarm.

"Your grace," he exclaimed, "what must you think! I——"

"Do not talk to me of that," said the other gently, lifting the other to his feet. "I have had no such thought. I want only your help to find out who this spy may be."

"In God's name, let us set about it!" exclaimed the old man. "He must be found—found instantly, or we are lost. You say you could not recognize him?"

"I did not see his face," said Geoffrey, "but both Gaston and I recognized his voice—he is some one we have known at my father's court. And it cannot be difficult, I think, to detect him, for, of course, he is one of your servants."

"My servants?" exclaimed Ducluys. "Imposible, your grace; they are all men I know as I know myself."

"That cannot make any difference," said

Geoffrey firmly; but the other interrupted him again.

"Yet listen," he exclaimed; "every man rode out with me to-night!"

"Every man?" echoed Geoffrey, astounded.

"Yes, your grace; I have wished to keep but few attendants, because of Raymond's suspicions; I took every man with me to-night in case of danger. And, besides, this fact that if you did not come to-night it would be to-morrow—I told that to no living soul except to Marguerite!"

Geoffrey started, and stared from one to the other in consternation.

"To no one but Marguerite!" he cried, and the old man went on swiftly: "No one of my men knew why we went out to-night until after we were clear of the city; and, what is more, when I told that to my daughter, we were locked in this very room."

For answer Geoffrey could do nothing but turn to the girl; and she, as much astounded

as her father, assured him that it was true, and that she had whispered not a word of it to a living soul.

The young man was silent for a time, and at last he said in a low voice: "There is only one thing that I can think of, only one possibility; you must have some traitor in your house who admits this spy to listen."

Those words brought a sudden thought to all the other three, and Gaston sprang up and glided swiftly to the door of the room.

He flung it open, but the hallway was deserted, the house silent and dark; he drew his sword and made a careful search, but he found nothing.

"At least," he said, when he came back and closed the door, "we are safe now."

"Let us speak in whispers none the less," rejoined Geoffrey. "Upon what I have to say to you now depend the lives of every one of us."

Then, while Ducluys and his daughter

listened with their eyes fixed upon his face, he told them what he had already told to Gaston about the plan which he hoped to carry out against Raymond.

"There are four of us here," he said, "and of us four no one has a doubt; if each of us keeps absolute secrecy, there can be no possibility of Raymond learning of my presence in Sarenne. We must realize clearly the chance we take, for if he knew that I was in this room he would have the place filled with his soldiers in half an hour, and we should pay for our daring with our lives and those of every friend we have. Let us understand then: Raymond knows everything but one thing, and yet he can do nothing until he knows that; and in that fact lies our one chance of safety."

Geoffrey paused for a moment to let his words be clearly realized; then added: "The first thing, Ducluys, is about that passage; you are sure that it is your secret?"

The words were no sooner past Geoffrey's

lips than they put the watchful Gaston in motion again; he took the lamp, went swiftly over, and opened the door.

Inside he could see far down the stone corridor, where all was silent as the grave. After he had closed the doors he even made another search of the room and the hall for some possible lurking place of a spy.

"We are playing for a dukedom," he said grimly, as he sat down again.

"That passage was known to two persons," explained Ducluys, "to your father and to me. It was built by my father in the old days, when his was the only Huguenot family in Sarenne. But because such things are apt to be useful at any time, I kept the secret—I told it only to your father, for I kept nothing from him. The night when you and Gaston escaped from Raymond was the first time in many long years that it had been used, and the last time until to-night. Even Marguerite knew nothing of it until your flight."

"Very well, then," said Geoffrey; "then that at least is safe; and Gaston and I will stay hidden in that passage until the time for action has come. You will do what you can to find out your traitor—though there is one favor you must do him first, if you please."

The other looked puzzled. "Listen," went on Geoffrey. "You will, of course, for Raymond's edification, spread the report among your servants that I have fled; but, in case that may not be effective, I want you when you go back to your room to write a letter to one of our friends—one that Raymond will very surely know of—and tell him that last night you met Gaston on your way back from the rendezvous, who told you that I had tried to rescue Victor, and had been badly wounded; and that I had decided to give up all hope of prevailing over Raymond.

"You must add that your last hope is gone, and that you will do no more for me. And then you must leave the note on your desk or

somewhere where it will surely be found, and do not make any attempt to catch the man who takes it—it is far more important that it should reach Raymond. We can trap your traitor some other time."

A look of sudden recollection and of pain had swept over Ducluys' face at the mention of his son, but he bit his lip and expressed his approval of Geoffrey's suggestion. "I think that is all," the young man added, starting to rise from his chair. "I must——"

Then suddenly his drawn features grew whiter than ever, and the room seemed to swim before him. He caught at the chair, and his three friends rushed to his side.

"You are ill!" exclaimed Ducluys.

"It is nothing," panted Geoffrey; "but I am worn out, that is all."

"He has lost much blood," put in Gaston, "and we have had nothing to eat since midday. He must be taken care of if this is not to turn to fever."

"He cannot try to hide in that passage to-night," exclaimed the old man; "it would kill him."

Geoffrey was too weak to make any objection; in fact, he was almost unconscious as Marguerite hastened out of the room to get food and wine, while the two men set to work dressing the wounded arm.

He had a faint recollection of hearing Ducluys say, "You must sleep upon the couch in this room to be near the passage for safety," and afterward hearing him add the caution to Gaston as he and his daughter left the room, to be sure and bolt the door fast, and to be very quiet.

After that it would have been hard to say whether it was insensibility or sleep which held him enchained for hours after.

When he wakened again, it was to a dim consciousness of a ringing in his head and a dull, heavy feeling in his limbs; everything in the room about him was dark and silent,

except that he could just hear the faint breathing of his faithful friend who was sleeping on the floor by his couch.

Geoffrey did not even open his eyes, but lay for a long time, dreamily trying to recall where he was, the events of the past and the hopes and fears of the future floating in strange confusion through his mind.

But in the midst of this there suddenly came something real that flashed across his consciousness like the gleam of a lightning stroke; there was something moving near him!

He heard the door creak slightly as it opened, and at the same instant there came surging through his mind the words he had heard, "Be sure to bolt the door fast!"

Geoffrey opened his eyes with a wild start; the first gray glimmer of morning was just entering the window, and by that faint light Geoffrey saw something that made his very

blood stand still—a black-mantled form gliding swiftly across the room.

It passed the window an instant later; and he saw who it was.

The memory had been stamped into his mind so that he could not ever forget it or be mistaken—it was the man who had sat upon the horse beside Duke Raymond!

There was one instant during which the young man sat paralyzed; then, realizing how much was at stake, he gripped himself together with a fearful effort, and seized his sword, nerving himself for a spring.

He sat watching with every faculty tense, waiting for the moment. The man had entered at the door and vanished in the darkness at the other end of the room; he must appear again soon.

Then suddenly, in the grave-like stillness, came a sound that caused Geoffrey to give a bound of horror; it was the familiar click of a latch. He leaped from the couch and

rushed across the room, only to find that his fearful guess was true—that he was too late —that the spy was gone!

And he had gone by the secret tunnel!

CHAPTER V

"OPEN IN THE NAME OF RAYMOND"

GEOFFREY'S first impulse, upon making his fearful discovery, was to call to his companion, open the door of the secret passage, and set out in wild chase of the intruder.

It seemed to him that the whole issue of life and death for himself and for all his friends must hang upon the race; for they had staked everything upon the chance of being able to deceive Raymond, and here, in the very first hours, they had been outwitted.

It was only necessary that this spy should once reach the duke to bring the whole of his forces down upon them and crush them like so many insects.

Geoffrey had actually drawn his breath to call to Gaston, when a new thought flashed over him, one that gave him pause.

Why pursue this man? What, after all, did he know?

The spy had passed through the room, but he could not have seen anything in the darkness; Geoffrey could not have seen who the man was had he turned toward him.

To be sure, it was possible he had known some one was asleep in the place, even though the couch was in a far corner; but he could have had no reason for suspecting it was Geoffrey. And was it conceivable that if he had seen him sleeping there alone and defenseless, he would not have earned Duke Raymond's lifelong favor by stabbing him before he fled?

Again, if he had known Geoffrey was there, why had he taken the risk of going on through the house, as surely he had done?

If the spy had not suspected Geoffrey's presence, it would be a grave error to pursue him.

All these things flashed through Geoffrey's

mind in the second or two that he stood irresolute. The risk was a fearful one either way—the very thought of the traitor's actually knowing of his presence made him shudder—but he made up his mind where the probability lay.

There were two things he must know to be certain.

In the first place, the man could certainly not have seen Geoffrey as he passed just now; the question was, had he been through the room before—had he come by the passage?

And in the second place, if he had, had he found that note?

Geoffrey darted toward his companion and shook him.

It took a second or two to make the astounded Gaston answer the questions flung at him.

"Did you lock that door?"

"Yes."

"Then the man came by the passage! Did Ducluys tell you where he slept—can you find him?"

"Yes."

"Then quick, tell him to see if his letter is gone, and come back here for his life. And not a sound!"

The half-dazed man dashed out of the room, while Geoffrey fell to pacing the floor like one wild.

It seemed ages—it was in reality only a few seconds—before Ducluys came rushing in, a look of terror upon his face.

He found Geoffrey with a sword in his hand, all ready for a dash into the passage.

He bounded toward his host with the one question on his lips; but Ducluys had answered it before it was asked, and Geoffrey sank back with an exclamation of relief.

The old man had fallen down upon his knees before him in despair, crying out: "Your grace, what can it mean, what can I

do? My house is my enemy's; I know not where to turn. The note is gone already!"

Ducluys, seeing the look on the other's face, exclaimed: "Your grace knows something about it! Quick, what is it?"

"I saw the man," Geoffrey answered quietly. "He came by the secret passage."

Ducluys started back with a cry.

"Then we are lost!"

He leaped to the door.

"Quick!" he called. "It may yet be time! We will follow! Lights—lights!"

But Geoffrey seized him by the arm with a firm hold.

"Be still," he whispered, speaking with new confidence. "Be calm; the man did not see me."

"Did not see you!" gasped Ducluys.

"No," said Geoffrey; "he passed swiftly through the room and it was dark; he had no thought of looking for me. So calm yourself; the danger is over now, and it was worth

this alarm to discover just how our informer came. It will be easy for us to take him when we wish, for I made no sound as I saw him moving across the room, and he can have no suspicions."

At that moment, however, like a flash a sudden thought occurred to the young man, and he took the lamp and went to the secret door.

Amid a dead silence he opened it and peered down the narrow stairway, which he found empty and silent.

"He is gone," he whispered, as he closed the door again; "he is gone and all is well."

"But, your grace," protested Ducluys, "is it not a fearful risk? He may have had some suspicion—enough to warrant Raymond in pouncing upon us."

"He could have no suspicion," answered the other, whose confidence rose more and more with each passing minute. "If he had any, he would have made sure, and I would not have been alive to tell you this. Let us

put the thought aside, and see where we stand."

The old man was so exhausted by his excitement that he could only sink back in a chair. But meanwhile Geoffrey went rapidly on:

"Raymond will have that letter of ours by the morning," he said, "and so I think that we are free for a few days from danger of detection by him. We know how the thing is done, and it will be easy to stop it. I think it would be the best plan for Gaston and me to stay out in one of the rooms of the old house, and take turns watching the secret passage. We can be quite certain then that our doings are no longer being spied on; and we can capture the fellow the next time he tries it."

"But we have no longer the passage to rely upon for safety," put in the old man weakly; "I thought of it as a means of saving you from Raymond."

"It is just as well," said Geoffrey grimly. "It will make me cast my fortune still more with yours. I have no wish to escape now—if we fail I am prepared to die. Our safety can lie only in our secrecy and the swiftness with which we lay our plans."

"I cannot imagine," went on Ducluys, after a moment's thought, "how that man can have learned the secret of my house. It fairly takes my breath away when I think that I lived in the midst of such a danger—that every plan I made, every word I said, was known to my deadly foe!"

"That which has saved you all along will save you still," was the other's reply. "Raymond wants me, and me alone. As to the passage, the man must have learned of it from my father, and, of course, he used it at night, to listen to your conversation with your daughter, and your servants, and to search among your papers while you slept."

The three men sat for a while after that,

each buried in his own thoughts. At last Geoffrey looked up to say:

"What shall we do now? Perhaps it were well if we discussed our plans, for we have much to do and the hours are precious."

Gaston looked at his young master's white face, and put in the first word he had spoken.

"I fear your grace is in no condition for such things yet," he said.

"It will be a long time before I can sleep again," Geoffrey answered; and Ducluys put in: "And I, too; I cannot free myself from the fear that Raymond may be on his way here now. What could we do? He would have us absolutely at his mercy; to attempt the passage would only be to run into another trap. Does not your grace think it might be well to hide somewhere else until we are sure he knows nothing?"

"We should only run risks of real discovery," was Geoffrey's reply, "and we would be no safer, for if Raymond really knew of my

presence he would have every house where you could take me searched before the sun was up. We shall have to stay and face the risk like men. But tell me something of what your plans are. There is every reason why we should settle things as soon as possible; we are in danger every minute that we delay."

"The plans must needs be simple ones," was the reply; "Black Raymond is hated by every true man in Sarenne, and the whole city is eager for his overthrow. It needs only that there be a leader, and the first sign of a successful rising. Raymond has the advantage of the ready force, he can strike at an instant and strike hard; but if you are only able to keep head against him in the streets for fifteen minutes, you will see the whole city in arms and your battle will be won."

"It ought not to be difficult to get together men enough for such a stand," said Geoffrey.

"It would not be, your grace, but for our

fearful need of secrecy. Every man that we add to our force is an extra chance of betrayal, and it seems to me, therefore, that we ought to choose the smallest number we can possibly do with, and choose only the oldest and most tried of your father's partisans. We ought not to do even that until we are quite ready—we ought not to give any man a chance to waver."

Geoffrey sprang up at the words, with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Ducluys," he cried, "are we not ready *now?*"

"That is as your grace decides," said the other.

"Then let the thing be done! I came here to fight, and I want nothing so much as the hour; I can do nothing but chafe till it is here. Let us settle upon the names of those men at once, and you can notify them as soon as daylight comes. We must find some meeting place where they can see me."

"Is that necessary?" put in the other. "I think——"

"I want to talk to the men who are to fight with me," declared Geoffrey; "if they can be trusted in the hour of the rising, they can be trusted with the fact that I am here. Can you find some safe place for them to gather as soon as darkness comes?"

Ducluys answered in the affirmative, and the other went on:

"Very well, I will see them and we will set the night after the meeting for the struggle. We can arrange then how the thing is to be managed; for the present there is only the question, who are the men?"

The two were interrupted by the cautious Gaston, who had been glancing about him uneasily; he went suddenly to the secret door and shut himself out in the tunnel, finding that the only way he could be sure that the spy had not returned to listen.

Geoffrey smiled, and then commenced dis-

cussing the citizens of Sarenne with the old man, who seemed to know the history of every one of them.

They chose first as guard of honor all who had been punished for their loyalty to Geoffrey's father, and afterward all those who were known to be smarting under particular outrages perpetrated by Black Raymond.

They spent several hours altogether over that task, and when it was done, they had a list of over a hundred names, among which it seemed quite certain there could be no traitor found.

"They with their servants and retainers should make quite a merry procession for Raymond to watch," was Geoffrey's laughing comment. He went then and released his indefatigable friend.

"Gaston, it is coming!" he exclaimed. "Oh, it is coming, and we are going to have a chance at them after all!"

From the sparkle in his eyes one might

have thought that the combat was just beginning.

"How are you going to let those men know of the meeting, Ducluys?" he asked a moment later. "Do not write your invitations, for some unwelcome guests might find them —some of Raymond's green devils."

Ducluys answered from the window, whither he had gone to look out:

"I will send for them," he said, "and tell each single man myself."

"That is good," commented the other, "and, Gaston, you and I will go to the old house and watch the passage, and see that no spy overhears. And to-morrow night we are going to fight and do wonderful things and tumble Raymond out of town!"

Geoffrey's animation was rather pathetic, for it was obvious that he was almost too worn out to stand; but he executed one or two fancy steps by way of expressing his excitement, and then sat down rather faintly.

Then he bit his lips and rose again with the remark:

"Let us go, Gaston; everything is ready, I think."

And it was at this point that Ducluys made a move that caused him to stop Geoffrey short.

The sun had been up a couple of hours, and the streets of the quaint old city were as wide awake as they ever got; but suddenly faint sounds that had come in at the window were drowned by the sharp rattle of horses' hoofs.

The old man started back with the cry:

"It is Raymond!"

Geoffrey would have sprung to the window, but Gaston clutched him by the arm with a sharp warning.

"They turned the corner by the market place!" exclaimed Ducluys. "They are coming this way!"

Geoffrey's heart was thumping unpleasantly, it must be owned, but his voice was

still calm as he replied, "I fancy he is not coming to see us."

Yet in spite of his indifferent tone it was to be noticed that Geoffrey, like the other two, stood very silent as the hoof beats came swiftly down the street.

To be sure, there was nothing strange in the fact that Raymond was riding through the city, but the other fearful possibility had to be reckoned with. The cavalcade rode directly underneath the window—and past it —Ducluys leaning forward, clutching the sill with quivering hands.

Then suddenly he leaped back, his face white as a sheet.

The galloping had stopped!

"Great God, we are lost!" the old man gasped, and the next instant came a thundering knock upon the gate, and a voice rang upon thei: ears, "Open in the name of Raymond!"

CHAPTER VI

RAYMOND'S THREAT

A MORE overwhelming surprise could not have overtaken those three men; they were dazed, helpless.

They could only gaze at one another in consternation, and it was not until the heavy knock and the call were heard again that one of them, Geoffrey, gathered his faculties and turned to face the issue.

"Quick, Ducluys," he cried, "what can we do? The passage?"

"It is a trap!" gasped the other hoarsely.

"Is there no escape in the rear, then?"

But even as Geoffrey put the question he recalled that the house was on the corner and abutted upon the dead wall of another dwelling; there were neither door nor windows except on the street.

"There is no way!" panted Ducluys, tottering and clutching at a chair. "We are lost —lost!"

But Geoffrey's courage only rose as the issue grew plainer; he whipped out his sword with a sudden burst of passion.

"There is one thing yet," he cried. "One!" and he turned upon the old man with energy which nerved his heart anew.

"Your servants? How many are there?"

"Six."

"And will they fight?"

"I think so."

"Call them!" commanded Geoffrey, and he rushed to the door with Ducluys.

They found the men hurrying about in terror in the hall below, seeking in vain for their master, while the banging upon the door grew louder.

Most of them had already armed themselves, and as they sprang up the steps at

Ducluys' hail, they found themselves face to face with the young heir of Sarenne.

There was no time for explanations, not even for a cry of surprise. The men understood the look they saw in Geoffrey's eyes, and they answered his cry of "Will you fight?" with a fierce and ready "Yes!"

It took Geoffrey but an instant more to choose his plan.

"Pierre," he said, "you open the door; and, Ducluys, you stay here, and when they try to lay hands upon you, spring up the steps to the next floor. Raymond will be the first to follow you, and we want only Raymond!"

In a moment more he and Gaston and the other men had hurried up to the top floor, where they crouched behind the landing.

There was an instant during which every one in the house was still, listening to the continued knocking, and then suddenly they heard old Pierre fling back the bolt and the

door swing open, letting in the tumult like a pent-up flood.

Above it all was the harsh voice of Raymond, asking for Ducluys.

Pierre must have answered, for the duke and some of his men tramped up the steps; in a moment more came an angry voice.

"Why was that door not opened sooner?"

"Your grace," Ducluys started to protest, "there was no time——"

Raymond broke in with an oath.

"No time!" he shouted. "Do you think you are talking to children? A little while behind bars would teach you better what obedience is, I fancy!"

Ducluys attempted no reply; the duke and his men had apparently reached the landing, for the tramping ceased and there was a moment's pause. Then Raymond's voice began again.

"Ducluys," he said, "I came to have a

word with you; it will not take long, but see that you listen."

"What is it, your grace?" asked the old man humbly.

"Ducluys, you have been corresponding with Geoffrey, have you not?"

"Yes, your grace," was the simple answer.

"Ha!" snapped the other. "You do not try to deny it!"

"There would be no use in my attempting to do that, your grace."

"No," laughed Raymond, "but I did not expect to find you so bold. It seems these burghers of Sarenne need a lesson every day."

The man paused for a moment, and his brow grew darker.

"Listen to me," he snarled, with another oath. "Did you suppose I was going to look on and do nothing while you played your traitor's tricks?"

Ducluys' reply, if he made any, was not audible; Raymond went on angrily:

"I can only tell you that I was ready to bag every single man of you in the city, so you may count yourself lucky that things turned out as they did. And now you may listen to what I have to tell you. In the first place, you have received information that Geoffrey is not coming, and you have decided to give up the plot; is that not so?"

The emotion with which old Ducluys and the six men up in the hall above listened to these words may be imagined.

They were almost as breathless as when the knock had come upon the gate. Could it really be possible that Raymond knew nothing of Geoffrey's presence after all; and that their plan had succeeded, and they were safe?

The duke did not fail to notice the old man's half-dazed look, but he guessed the wrong cause.

He and his troopers burst out into a roar of laughter, and Raymond exclaimed: "So

you wonder how I learned that new secret! Fool that you are, I knew what your plans were almost as soon as you did!"

There was a moment's silence, during which old Ducluys' ear was caught by a faint sound of footsteps above; a moment later he heard a door shut softly and locked, and then he gave a gasp of relief.

He remained silent, and after a moment Raymond went on in a lower voice:

"Now listen, Philippe Ducluys," he said, "you know I am no faint-hearted man, and I don't mind killing when it serves me. You had best count yourself a lucky dog that you are still alive—it is principally because you are too old to do any harm. I assure you that it never happened before in this town that a man dared to own his treason before my face! But now you have given Geoffrey up so you say; and I have only to tell you to stand by your resolution, if you know what is good for you. Last night, as perhaps you

don't know, I went out to ambush the fellow, and bagged your son by mistake."

Ducluys staggered backward, and Raymond laughed.

"That hurts, does it?" said he. "Well, now see; he is not dead—I have him in my castle——"

The old man started forward with a sudden cry, and flung himself on his knees before Raymond.

"Your grace," he cried, "mercy!"

"Do not begin any of that with me," was the snarling reply; "if you want to save your son, there is one way you may do it, and only one. Listen."

He paused for a moment, fixing his dark eyes on his victim.

"Ducluys," he continued, "every move you have made in seven years has been known to me, and always will be; so I know that what Geoffrey does and what trouble he causes me depend upon *you*,

"And now your last son is my hostage; some day when my agents succeed in killing Geoffrey he shall be free, but in the mean time he shall stay with me. And you have the one thing to remember: the day Geoffrey enters Sarenne your son dies! The day that I find you doing any more plotting, or that there is the first sign of trouble in my streets about Geoffrey, he dies! You know that I am a man of my word, so do not be a fool again and try to deceive me."

Raymond stopped for a moment, and then asked in a grim voice, "Do you understand that, Philippe Ducluys?"

As the old man bowed his head, the tyrant added, "That is all," and turned with his warriors and strode in stern silence down the steps.

It was only a minute more before the door closed behind him, and yet another before the galloping hoof beats were dying away in the distance, like the thunder of a passing storm.

But in the mean time the old man stood as Raymond had left him, bent and shaking, and with bowed head.

A minute passed and then another, and one might have seen his lips working, seen the knotted veins stand out upon his forehead.

At last, with a sudden throbbing energy he gripped his hands and bit into his lip. He raised his head, and there was a fierce gleam in his eyes as he strode to the staircase.

"Geoffrey of Sarenne," he called, "the house is clear."

A lock was heard to turn up-stairs; the men came out of the room still a little dazed at their marvelous deliverance.

But Ducluys thought only of Geoffrey, and he stood at the foot of the stairs and gazed up at him.

"Did you hear what Raymond said?" he asked quickly.

"Not the last part," was the answer; "we shut the door; what was it?"

"It was but an idle threat," said Ducluys, his voice never faltering. "He had got the letter and is deceived; Sarenne will very soon be ours."

CHAPTER VII

A STARTLING INSCRIPTION

Geoffrey and his friend soon took their departure, to rest and watch the secret passage.

The young heir of Sarenne paused therefore only long enough to warn Ducluys' retainers of the importance of keeping his presence unknown. The secret was out, but there was no fear of betrayal from men who had been willing to stake their lives as these had.

"It's only six more added to our little army," said Geoffrey, with a smile. Then he added: "We shall have to come back two or three times for something to eat, and then you, Ducluys, may tell me how things are going. You will send word to our friends at once, I suppose."

"I shall, your grace. Good by," the old man answered, his voice still firm.

But when Geoffrey was gone, he staggered back and clutched at the balustrade, where he stood for a moment, shaking from head to foot.

At the same instant a curtain at one side was pushed away, and a frightened face peered out. It was Marguerite, who had been hiding in the next room.

She saw that the last of the servants had gone, then she rushed out and flung herself upon her knees before the old man and clasped his trembling hand.

"Father, father," she cried, "what can you mean? How can you do it?"

Ducluys gave a violent start.

"You heard Raymond?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes!" panted the girl. "Oh, father, it is too cruel, it is too ghastly! You cannot do it—Geoffrey would not let you do it! Oh, I must tell him before it is too late!"

She staggered to her feet and started up the steps; but in those few seconds the old man had mastered himself again.

"Marguerite," he said in a stern voice, "stop!"

The girl halted and turned.

"You cannot mean it!" she gasped.

All the sternness was gone out of the old man's tone as he spoke again; his voice was hollow and so mournful that it shook the girl's soul. "Marguerite," he said, "I must!"

She fled back to his feet with a wailing cry, and clung to him in terror. "Listen," she whispered hoarsely. "I tell you it is too awful! Think what it means! Geoffrey could stay somewhere else, he could find others to help him! And this is Victor, our Victor!"

Ducluys' lips quivered, but he still kept his hands clenched.

"Marguerite," he said, "do you think that if there were fighting in Sarenne to-day, and Victor were free, he would not help? Do

you think that he would not be the first man to die if he were needed?"

"Oh, but, father," moaned the girl, "that would be in battle; a man can do that! But this other—it is murder!"

Ducluys clasped his hands to his forehead and cried out, "Do you not suppose I know how hard it is?"

Marguerite could say no more, could only cling to him, sobbing and shuddering.

Then after a long pause the old man went on slowly and in a choking voice:

"Marguerite, let us be brave, let us help each other and make this fearful sacrifice no harder than it is. God has not chosen to grant us peaceful lives and love and happiness; he has put us in a time when men's hearts are torn, when they must needs take their lives in their hands, and when to do right costs almost more than a soul can bear. And yet, my daughter, we dare not do less than right—we *dare* not be dastards!"

He paused, and the girl whispered hoarsely, "What *is* right?"

Ducluys lifted his eyes to a picture upon the wall, and Marguerite followed his gaze.

"Listen," he said in a low tone; "do you remember how often in those happy days that are gone, when you and Victor played in this room as children, I told you the wonderful old story of our ancestor, De St. Pierre, and his noble deed when King Edward of England was besieging Calais?

"You remember I told you how he threatened all its people with the sword, but then promised to spare them if there were six men found in the city to take upon them the fate of the rest; and how in the fearful hour that followed there was one soul brave enough to be true? We used to learn that story from Jehan le Bel by heart, you and I, because it was so very beautiful.

"'Then stood up Master Eustace de St. Pierre, and spake thus before all: "My mas-

ters, great grief and wrong would it be for all to leave a people such as this to die; and great charity and grace he would win from our Lord, who could save them from dying. For me, I have much hope in the Lord, that if I can save the people by my death I shall be pardoned for my faults, therefore I will be the first of the six of my own accord to put myself barefoot in my shirt, and with a halter about my neck, at the mercy of King Edward." '"

"Father!" the girl whispered in a frightened voice.

"And now listen; it is cruel, it is fearful, as you say; but yet God has put us here. This poor people of Sarenne have borne just as much wrong, and stand now in just as great danger, as ever did the men of Calais. They lie here, every soul of them, at the mercy of this villain, who cares not for God nor man. Look, Marguerite!"

He drew her gently toward the window,

where far across the open square and beyond some buildings could be seen the turrets of Raymond's palace. There was an iron railing upon the wall, and a dark object could be seen upon one of the spikes.

"That is the head of De Rastignac," said Ducluys, his voice trembling. "Look at it, Marguerite!"

He stood in silence, and the shaking girl clung to him.

Every one in Sarenne knew the story of De Rastignac, how he had heard his wife's scream as he came home, and slain one of Prince Armand's troopers in his house. Now his head was there upon the wall.

"Listen, girl," the old man went on swiftly; "this Raymond is master, and he boasts of his enemies; and before such things there is but one duty. It is not our cause, it is God's cause; there is nothing to choose but righteousness or baseness.

"We and our lives and the lives of those

we love must all be nothing; we must give ourselves and all that we have to this cause. We must nerve ourselves to a death struggle —die in the battle and count it nothing, if only the victory is won.

"And, Marguerite, my precious heart, it would be easy for me to do that—my life is worn; I could die a thousand deaths to see Raymond driven from Sarenne; but when it comes to Victor, and his life, it is awful; it is almost more than my soul can bear! And I need all the strength that you can give me. Help me, Marguerite; make me brave!"

The old man, with a sudden throb of grief, caught the girl to his arms and sobbed out the words as if he were a child.

Marguerite's lips were white with the cruel effort, but she cried with new life in her voice: "But is there no half-way—can we not save Victor?"

"It calls for all the strength we have," gasped the old man, "this fearful struggle with

Raymond! If I told Geoffrey the truth he would spend his time searching Raymond's dungeons with his men when he should be leading them against Raymond himself. I know him—if he knew this nothing could make him do his duty to himself.

"Listen, girl—for after all, God has made it easy for me to fight! He has given me rage—fiery rage that surges up in my heart at the thought of this fiend—so that when it comes upon me I know I could kill Victor, yes, kill even you, for a sacrifice, if it were needed to bring justice upon him!"

"I hate him, too!" cried the girl in sudden wild passion.

A strange light leaped into her eyes.

"I can conquer, too," she exclaimed. "I am no coward, nor Victor either, and we can die. And Raymond shall not triumph over us."

It was as if the young girl's soul had suddenly caught fire from her father's. She went

on hurriedly, pouring out her half incoherent defiance of Raymond, her voice rising higher and higher, until at last it broke in a choking sob and she flung herself into her father's arms again, crying out, "Only let it be soon —I cannot bear it long!"

Ducluys did not speak until her wild outburst had subsided, and then as she clung to him he said in a low, mournful tone: "Poor child, I cannot help you now; I have work to do, long and hard work; I have to fill many hearts with the fire of this desperation—I cannot heed my own grief. But go and pray for help—pray for strength to bear your burden, and for Victor to bear his."

He bent over the shuddering girl and kissed her, and hot tears fell upon her head; then he led her slowly away and out of the room.

When he returned, he shut the door, sank down upon a couch, and buried his head in his hands.

It could not have been more than a minute or two, however, before he staggered to his feet and went to the steps.

"Pierre," he called, "come up; it is time work began."

And when the man came he found his master pale, but calm, and giving no sign of the struggle that had shaken him.

"I have many errands for you, Pierre," he said. "We have no time to lose."

"Very well, my lord," was the other's reply, "but before you begin, here is a letter which was just left at the gate."

"A letter?" echoed Ducluys as he took the missive; then seeing that it was addressed to him, he broke the seal and opened it.

He had taken but one glance when he gave a violent start.

"Pierre," he gasped, staring at him, "in the name of heaven, who left this letter?"

"I know not, my lord," was the reply; "it was a strange man."

Old Ducluys looked again, as if unable to believe the evidence of his eyes.

The packet had contained another letter, carefully sealed and inscribed, "To be delivered immediately and unopened to Geoffrey of Sarenne!"

CHAPTER VIII

"IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE"

Ducluys waited only long enough to despatch his servants to summon the first few of the conspirators, and then hurriedly procured a light and made his way down through the tunnel, eager to find who could be the sender of that most unexpected letter.

When he reached the deserted house, he found the faithful Gaston dutifully on watch by the entrance, and Geoffrey asleep near by.

The old man had only to say a word as to the reason for his coming to cause Gaston to spring up and awaken his friend. Geoffrey hastily broke open the seal of the letter, exclaiming, "I cannot possibly imagine what it can contain!"

In another moment he read the note aloud

to his two companions, who listened eagerly. It ran as follows:

DEAR FRIEND:

You will certainly be astonished at receiving this when you suppose that no one knows of your presence in Sarenne; I think, however, that you will not mind having one confidant——

Geoffrey stopped there, with the exclamation: "Who can this be? The writing looks familiar!"

He turned the letter over to see the signature, and then he gazed up at Gaston with an excited cry, "Why, it's Eugene Restand!"

"Eugene Restand!" echoed the other in amazement.

"Who is he?" inquired Ducluys anxiously.

"A friend of mine at the court of Duke Charles," replied Geoffrey, and went swiftly on with the letter:

I trust you will be as glad to see me as I am to be in Sarenne to help you. You must know, in the first place, that I ran away from my guardian at the court and had no

end of adventures; I galloped like mad to catch up to you, but it was no use.

I reached Sarenne last night about half past ten, too late to get into the city. I was just proceeding to make myself comfortable for the night when I saw two men, whom I surmised to be you and Gaston, climbing the wall; I did not try to follow, for fear of increasing the danger, but I am writing to you the first thing in the morning, being sure you have gone to Ducluys'.

My dear Geoffrey, I have come to help you, and I am at your disposal, a true sword and a true heart; but I am sending you this secret letter instead of coming myself because I have been cherishing a plan to help you even more than I can by fighting—which is by presenting myself at Raymond's court and giving you what aid I can; a man doesn't care much what he does with Raymond.

Can you not come this evening about ten o'clock and have a talk with me? To all appearances, it will be a dark night, and I have taken every precaution to make sure of secrecy.

I am at the Cabaret of the Golden Dog, and if a muffled figure were to knock three times at the side door in the narrow alley, he would be brought to my room without having to speak a word. I have given a false name here, so pray keep that fact in mind when you see me. To see you soon! EUGENE RESTAND.

Geoffrey ceased reading, a look of relief upon his face. "That is certainly a pleasant surprise," he exclaimed. "It will give me

heart to see a man who has done so much for the sake of friendship."

"Your grace is surely not going!" exclaimed Ducluys in alarm.

"Not going!" retorted Geoffrey. "Why, of course I'm going. Why not?"

"The danger, your grace!"

"What danger?"

"Why, in the first place, that of being seen upon the streets!"

"But if it is a dark night? And was I not going out with you, any way, to meet our friends? You surely were not intending to have the meeting at your house."

"No," said Ducluys; "the place is too carefully watched. But then——"

"And you surely don't imagine that I'd be less in danger when I was with you!" laughed Geoffrey. "I am well able to realize my peril and keep quiet. No one has the slightest idea of looking for Geoffrey of Sarenne."

"Ssh!" whispered Ducluys, glancing round him nervously. "That spy might come here now."

"I will watch the door," said Gaston; "speak low."

He crept away, and the other two went on.

"Your grace," asked the old man anxiously, "how is it possible to be sure that the letter is not a trick?"

"A trick!" echoed Geoffrey. "In Heaven's name, who would dream of sending a letter to me at your house? Would not Raymond have searched it this morning if he had a suspicion? And besides, I know this writing."

"And can you trust this man?"

"Trust him," laughed Geoffrey—"when he has come all this way to help me? He was my best friend at Charles' court."

"But your grace must remember that Raymond received exact information as to your doings there—things which he could not possibly have learned by spying upon me. We

have often wondered who could have told him."

"At least, Eugene did not," said the other decidedly; "to say nothing of the fact that he is my friend and a gentleman, what in the world could he owe to Raymond or expect from him to bring him here on such an errand? Last of all, when he saw me enter the city, why in the world did he not simply tell Raymond instead of going at it in this queer way?"

Ducluys could answer nothing to this last argument, though he still shook his head uncertainly.

"Why not send for him to come here," he said, "instead of you taking the risk?"

"That would be a nice way to treat a friend, to put him in danger!" laughed Geoffrey. "Think, Ducluys, must I not feel I owe this man something for his unselfishness?"

"Yes, to be sure," was the reply, "but then——"

"And, by the way," added Geoffrey, "to settle the matter, he didn't tell me what name he went under; so I couldn't write to him, even if I chose."

The old man was still far from being satisfied, but he could think of no other objection.

"At least, your grace will take some of my men with you," he remarked.

But Geoffrey answered that one would be less likely to attract attention than a number.

"If I had any thought of danger," he said, "I assure you I should not go."

Gaston, who after prowling around had returned to hear this decision, interposed with the statement that at least he must be allowed to go; but the other answered him dryly: "You forget that you got me to promise to sleep all day by undertaking to keep away from the meeting and sleep here all night instead. No, I shall go alone unless something happens meanwhile. Ducluys, where were you planning to have my friends meet?"

"I thought, your grace," was the reply, "of the old council building, which, as you know, has been idle and deserted ever since your father's death; it is in an unfrequented part of the city, and there would be no trouble in opening one of the windows in the rear. I think the place would not be inappropriate, for many of the men you are to meet belonged to the council in the old days when the city's liberties were respected."

"That is not a bad reason," said Geoffrey; "the surroundings will perhaps fire their loyalty."

Then he added with a smile: "And yet another reason is that the building is directly next door to the Cabaret of the Golden Dog, where I am to meet Eugene! Did you happen to think of that?"

"I thought of it when you read the letter," the old man replied, "but the fact did not please me; I am by no means reconciled to your determination to take this extra risk."

"You will find me on hand at your meeting," said Geoffrey quietly. "Tell our friends that the time is eleven, which will give me an hour with Eugene; and let them be careful to approach by different sides of the old council house, so that no attention may be attracted in the neighborhood. It would indeed be a fearful ending to all our plans if Raymond were to capture the whole party there."

"God forbid!" said Ducluys, with a shudder.

The two sat for a few minutes more, conversing in whispers, then Ducluys remarked that it was time for him to leave if he was to be on hand to receive his visitors.

As he took his departure he said: "I shall meet them all in that room where I first saw you, because it is the quietest; therefore I shall rely upon you and Gaston to see that the spy does not enter the tunnel."

"We will attend to it," rejoined Geoffrey, with a smile. "But, as a matter of fact, I do

not think it is likely he will try, because Raymond is satisfied now. I shall see you once or twice before this evening," he added, "to inquire how everything is progressing; and in the mean time I suppose Gaston will insist upon rocking me to sleep again."

After Ducluys had gone, Geoffrey spent most of his time sitting motionless in a corner of the dark house and slowly maturing his plans.

The day had clouded over as it advanced, until by nightfall a heavy rain was falling, a circumstance very welcome to Geoffrey.

A short while before the time arrived for his venture to the inn, he went up to see Ducluys, and learned that no one of the chosen band would fail him at the place of meeting.

Ducluys again protested against his purpose, but the other waved his objections aside, and he was just starting off when Marguerite appeared.

Geoffrey stopped in wonder as he saw her;

there was nothing to be read of his feelings upon the old man's face, but those of the girl had left their impress plainly.

She was white, and seemed to be quivering with emotion. He thought of her brother, whom he believed to be dead, and he bowed his head in sympathy.

Old Ducluys had gone; Marguerite came forward and laid her hand upon his arm. "Duke Geoffrey," she said.

"Not yet, Marguerite."

"Listen to me," went on the girl in a low, trembling voice. "I wonder if you know how much is hanging upon your fate—how men are to suffer and struggle for you? I heard father say that you were going upon an errand of danger; I prayed for you; you are our hope and our life. Oh, will you not be careful?"

The other was deeply stirred.

"God bless you," he said; "I shall do all that one man can."

"Oh, you must win!" whispered the girl, her voice choking. "If I could only find some word to say to you, to tell you how I feel! We must be saved from this terror—such things ought not to be in the world! And men must not give their lives in vain!"

Geoffrey stood for a moment more, gazing into Marguerite's white face. The girl seemed to him like some flower, so sensitive and frail; he wondered how she could bear what he saw was surging in her heart.

"How I wish that I could help!" the girl added wildly. "I know that I could die, if I were a man."

"Sometimes," Geoffrey answered gravely, "women give help, too; most wonderful help."

As she gazed up at him there was a light in her eyes.

"If there were any courage that I could help to give you," she said—"if it were anything to you to know that one woman's soul was hanging upon the issue, that one woman's

prayers were with you night and day, wherever you may be!"

Geoffrey, with a sudden impulse, bent down upon one knee and took the girl's hand and pressed it to his lips, a kind of strange awe in his heart.

"Marguerite," he whispered, "it is a new consecration to have heard such words. God help us!"

The girl stood where she was, with bowed head; Geoffrey paused a moment, then silently released the hand and went slowly away.

It was not until he had disappeared in the passage that Marguerite at last moved, staggered weakly to her room, and sank down upon the bed again, shuddering.

Meanwhile Geoffrey was hurrying down the dark tunnel, his mind filled with very solemn thoughts. That brief episode had been a very fearful view for him into the heart of the struggle he was waging.

He wondered for a moment if he should

undertake his present errand; he felt more than ever aware of the need of watchfulness. But as he reviewed the situation he could see no danger, and he shook off his doubts.

Wrapping his mantle close about his face (as the stormy night gave good occasion) and making his way out of the old house by the secret window, he hurried away to the Cabaret of the Golden Dog.

The inn lay quite a distance from the house, and the way was black and wet, but Geoffrey pushed on eagerly, his mind full of the joy of meeting the friend he loved—loved more than ever since this last proof of devotion.

It seemed but a short while before the gloomy stone building of the old council hall loomed up before him—beyond it the little two-story frame house with one or two windows blinking uncertainly through the storm.

There was no one about the streets, and Geoffrey passed unseen through the narrow alley that separated the two places. He

dodged quickly out of the rain into the shadow of the doorway which had been indicated in the letter, and knocked as he had been directed.

He paused a moment, waiting eagerly; at last the door was opened, and a tall, shadowy form, scarcely to be seen in the darkness, peered out. Then the door was silently flung wide and Geoffrey entered. He turned and went up a flight of steps, the other following without asking a question.

He knocked upon a door, a voice cried, "Come in!" and the door opened.

Geoffrey's hand had been upon his sword, but he waited for only one glance before he took it away.

Eugene Restand was standing in the center of the room, and Geoffrey sprang forward and rushed to his arms.

The door of the room had been silently closed again, so there was no witness to the greeting of the two.

Geoffrey's heart was full of generous friendship and welcome, and there was only delight in his words. His friend, however, seemed chiefly dazed, and stared at him in wonder.

"Is it really you?" he gasped again and again.

"Of course," laughed Geoffrey; "one would have thought you did not know I was in Sarenne!"

"I did not think you would come!" the other answered. "But it is wonderful to see you again."

"And to think that you came to help me!" Geoffrey exclaimed. "I cannot get over the joy of it!"

"Do not let us stop to talk," was Eugene's reply.

He was a man of about Geoffrey's age and form, gayly dressed, as became a courtier, and with a merry, vivacious air. "Tell me quickly," he went on, "what is the news?"

Geoffrey, before he answered, rose and went to the door to make sure there was no listener; he locked it and came back.

"Let us speak low," he said. "I cannot be too careful, Eugene, for if Raymond knew I were in Sarenne——"

"It is wonderful how you kept it from him!" exclaimed the other. "I heard he went to Ducluys' house this morning."

"It was not for me," laughed Geoffrey; "we found out a spy of Raymond's, and put a false letter in his way, and so everything is going safely."

"Ah," cried Eugene, "and your plans are all ready!"

"All," Geoffrey answered; "there was no reason for delay. You must come with me and share in the glory. But, before I tell you anything, Eugene, you must understand that it is a fearful secret——"

"There is no need to warn me," the other replied swiftly. "I know Raymond."

"Well, then, I am to meet a party of our best friends to-night—in the old council house beside us, by the way; and we are to make all our plans then. I have been thinking about them all day—we must manage to lure Raymond out of the city, and then storm the gate and palace."

"And when is this to be?"

"To-morrow night."

The other gave a start and gasped for breath.

"So soon?" he cried.

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "But not so loud! Everything is ready, and we are sure to succeed. Every delay was danger."

"St. Benedict!" exclaimed the other. "I had not believed it possible! I am indeed come just in time, then. But to think of such a thing! And Raymond with no idea you are here! Geoffrey, I admire you—it is superb!"

"And I have come to take you away with

me, Eugene," laughed the other. "You shall share the victory."

"I will go," cried the other in turn. He sprang up swiftly. "What time is this meeting of yours?" he whispered.

"Eleven," was the reply.

The man gave an exclamation of annoyance. "Eleven! Why, how late—I thought you were going to it now!"

"I came to spend the time with you," said Geoffrey, laughing. "But what difference could it make?"

"I thought you might go to it now, and that I could come and meet you. We cannot stay here."

"Why not?"

"There is a man coming here to see me. You see, I did not think it was safe staying at an inn."

"But you are to come with me," put in Geoffrey.

"Yes, of course, but let me explain. I was

not sure of finding you; and this man is an old friend of my father's, and I thought I'd go to his house. But it wouldn't do for him to see you."

"What's his name?" asked Geoffrey.

"It's d'Albert—or d'Albin, or some such name; I never saw him!"

"I don't know the name," said Geoffrey, knitting his brows.

"He's been in Sarenne only a year or two," the other answered; he laid his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder and went on. "You see, Geoffrey, I knew you'd be glad to see me, but I really had no idea you'd take this risk, and I thought I'd have a long hunt."

"You ought to have known better," rejoined Geoffrey.

"Yes, I should; and it's a nuisance now, for you see I'd allowed you only a little grace —I told this man to be here about ten minutes after ten. And you mustn't be here——"

"I can hide in the room."

"No, that is taking useless risks. Can't you——"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Geoffrey suddenly; "I can easily get into the old council house and wait there. You'll come over quickly, will you not?"

"In a few moments," answered the other, "unless I can't get rid of this fellow. Let us hurry, Geoffrey."

He hastily extinguished the light for safety; Geoffrey flung his mantle about him again, and, pausing only for a hearty handshake with his friend, passed out of the door and down the steps of the lonely inn.

"Be quick," he heard Eugene whisper, "you can open the door yourself."

Then the door of the room above was closed, and Geoffrey went on swiftly down in the darkness.

The door opened silently, and he faced the raging night again; he was just tightening

his mantle and setting out, when it seemed to him he heard a faint sound in the rear.

He turned with a start to find that a man had glided up behind him and was standing at his side, the same towering person who had opened the door for him before; there was just an instant of silence, after which the young man heard a whisper, and made out three words that fairly caused his hair to rise.

"*Geoffrey of Sarenne!*"

A moment later, before he had time for even so much as one gasp, the tall, black form bent toward him with the words: "If you value your life, follow me instantly, and without making a sound!"

CHAPTER IX

A FIERCE FIGHT AND A STERN CHASE

Geoffrey stood for a moment, thunderstruck; when he turned, the man had moved silently back into the hallway.

The young duke stood hesitating; it was a situation of fearful possibilities, yet there was something strangely impressive about the voice he had heard. Though he was not used to being commanded, he turned and followed.

The man flung open a door leading into a dimly lighted room; he entered and so did Geoffrey.

The stranger locked the door and then turned, the other gazing at him wonderingly.

He was a tall, dark-browed man, with stern,

resolute features and deep sunk eyes. When he spoke again, it was still in the same deep-toned, impressive voice.

"Your grace may take off that thing," he said, alluding to Geoffrey's cape; "there is no one to see you here."

The other flung it away and stood leaning upon the table.

"What is it you wish with me?" he asked. "And in Heaven's name, how did you know me?"

"I will soon show you," the man answered. "I know everything in Sarenne."

"Who are you?" asked Geoffrey.

"No one of any consequence," was the reply, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I am the host of the Golden Dog."

"Oh," said Geoffrey, "I see. And what have you to say to me?"

"I have one thing to show you," the man responded. "But first it will be necessary that your grace should trust me."

He was eying Geoffrey silently, and the young man returned his gaze. The man's presence was that of a gentleman rather than an innkeeper.

"I live in the midst of my foes," said Geoffrey. "I can trust almost no man."

"Yet your grace does not fear to trust *some* people," the other answered gravely. "If your grace were wise, he would know that his real friends are the plain people of the city, who love him."

Geoffrey answered nothing at first; he had been studying the man, and just then from under his cloak he saw the handle of a sword projecting.

"An unusual state of affairs for an innkeeper," he was thinking; and then suddenly the man, noticing his glance, divined his thought and stepped back.

He laid his hand upon the weapon, and Geoffrey, with a sudden start, did likewise; but the man merely smiled and went over to

the other side of the room and drew the sword. Then taking it by the point, he held it out to Geoffrey.

"Your grace will soon know why I wear it," he said, "but in the mean time you may keep it."

"I do not wish it," returned Geoffrey, without moving from his place. "I am not afraid. What do you wish me to do?"

The other's reply was to unlock another door and ascend a narrow flight of stairs, beckoning to his companion to follow.

In the room above he turned and whispered: "If you value your life, do not make a sound, whatever happens. Will you promise me that?"

"I promise," was the answer, and the man stepped to the wall, opening one of the panels in it with a hidden spring.

It disclosed a narrow closet, and instantly could be heard sounds coming from the next room, of a man walking swiftly. A light

streamed through a tiny crack, and the host motioned Geoffrey to advance to it.

His amazement may be imagined when he found that he was looking into the apartment he had just left. Eugene Restand was pacing up and down, apparently greatly excited, for he was clenching his hands and moving his lips nervously.

Geoffrey gazed at him a moment and then looked to see what the nature of this secret device might be.

He found that he was standing behind a large picture which he had seen on the wall of the other room; he could feel the canvas with his hand.

"You heard everything we said!" he whispered to the innkeeper, who stood at his side.

The other bowed his assent.

"And what now?" asked Geoffrey, to which the man answered, "Wait."

A few seconds' waiting was all that was

needed; there came a swift step on the stair, and Eugene whirled about.

A man entered the room, a swarthy, black-haired Italian; Eugene leaped toward him, caught him by the shoulders, and stared into his face.

"Well, what's——" the man began; and Eugene panted breathlessly, "By the Lord, Giovanni, he's *here!*"

The man staggered back, turning almost pale.

"Here?" he gasped. "It is not possible!"

"It's true! I saw him!" cried Eugene. "He was in this room!"

The man stopped; he seemed almost dazed by the news, and his breath came hard and fast.

"In this room!" he echoed, and then with a sudden rush of emotion he sprang toward Eugene and grasped him by the hand, exclaiming, "Monsieur, your fortune is made!"

"Yes," said the other, "I know it."

At the same instant Geoffrey, dazed, turned to his companion and whispered, "Who is this man?"

"It is Giovanni Rezzio," was the calm reply.

"And who is he?"

"The third blackest villain in Sarenne," came the answer. "He is Raymond's secretary!"

And Geoffrey had to steady himself by the wall as he turned to listen again.

"By St. Mary!" the Italian was exclaiming, "who could have thought such a thing possible? And you say he was there when the duke was at Ducluys' house?"

"I do, indeed," the other answered.

"But that letter," exclaimed Giovanni—"that letter!"

"It was a trick!" laughed Eugene. "It was to fool Raymond. Geoffrey has found out your spy!"

"To think of it!" the other cried. "A plot hatching under our very noses; and this Geoffrey managing it all!"

"The danger was more immediate than you imagine," responded Eugene. "This very night a meeting was to be held—and in the old building directly across the way! Geoffrey is waiting there for me now."

"Quick," cried the Italian, "let us see the duke!"

"Oh, there is no hurry," smiled the other easily; "they do not assemble for some time yet, and Geoffrey will wait for me anyhow."

He seemed to enjoy piling up his revelations, and exhibiting the importance of his discovery. He had, in fact, kept his most thrilling bit of news for the last. When he told the other of the fact that the uprising had been planned for the following night, and of the dangerous strength which it bid fair to

possess, the secretary's face was indeed a study to behold.

"Monsieur," he cried wildly, "they might have conquered us!"

"Assuredly," said the other coolly; "I think they would have. Geoffrey is a very devil incarnate when he once gets in a fight, and all Sarenne hates Raymond."

"Curse all Sarenne!" cried the other, bringing his fist down on the table. "But oh, how the scoundrels shall pay for this treason!"

"Yes," observed Eugene, "no doubt. We may leave that to Raymond. He has them of course absolutely at his mercy now—he can pounce upon them and nab the whole crew whenever he likes."

"Monsieur Restand," added the other quickly, "certainly nothing he can ever do will repay you for such a service."

"I ask high pay," said the other, with a smile. "But I hope that this may win it.

Assuredly nothing that Duke Raymond could give would be more precious than the hand of mademoiselle the countess."

"The match would not displease mademoiselle," the Italian replied suavely. "But tell me, how came monsieur to guess this most extraordinary secret?"

"Oh, it was easy, Giovanni," laughed Eugene. "You see, I know Geoffrey—I have not kept watch upon him seven years for nothing. I simply knew that he was not the man to turn back for any reason such as the one given in that letter. Raymond and his son laughed at me—even mademoiselle, his daughter, laughed at me—but I thought it was worth the chance.

"I was sure that Ducluys would know where he was if any one did; and I knew, too, that if he'd come at all he must have come by the wall last night. I sent him a letter asking him to meet me, but I tell you honestly, Giovanni, I laughed at myself after

it was sent. I came within an ace of not coming. And when Geoffrey walked into the room—by Heaven, I could scarcely keep my senses!"

"But it was he?" exclaimed the Italian eagerly.

"Yes, indeed it was he; and we have him!"

Eugene sat for a moment gazing at his companion's delighted face, and then he leaned back and laughed heartily.

"It was such a treat!" he cried. "You should have been here behind the curtain! He was so delighted to see me; and he told me his plans so fast—I did not have to ask him a question! And he is so wonderfully sure of success, and he's gone over there to sit in the dark and wait for me! Oh, oh!"

Monsieur Restand seemed to consider this a most exquisitely humorous recital, and he leaned back, a perfect picture of hilarity.

It was interesting to watch his face; it was

still more interesting a moment later, when a strange event took place.

The smile seemed fairly to turn to stone upon his lips, and then an instant later it was followed by a look of the wildest horror.

From a full-length portrait which hung at one side of the room had suddenly come a ripping, tearing sound, and the blade of a sword had slashed through the canvas from top to bottom in one stroke. The next instant out leaped Geoffrey, sword in hand, his face purple with wrath, and his eyes glowing like coals of fire. He charged upon the two men as a wild bull might have done, and they turned in terror and sprang behind the center table.

The move gave them only an instant, but it was time enough for them to draw their swords—after which it was easy to stop Geoffrey's onset.

Geoffrey, though wild with rage, was a swordsman, and no swordsman ever lets him-

self lose his head. When there are two men to fight, there is only one way to do it. He stopped, and step by step as the two tried to pass round him, stepped backward, far back to the very corner of the room, where at last he made his stand, and fought like the raging tiger that he was.

It was at this moment that the innkeeper stepped out from the picture and stood to watch the fight.

It was a wonderful fight to see, for Geoffrey was born of a race of soldiers, and all his life he had been training for the winning of Sarenne. He knew every trick and turn of the business, and his arm was made of steel.

The two men set upon him like very fiends, but he was a match for them both, and he kept both of them working for their very lives.

To be sure, if ever a man had cause to fight, it was Geoffrey; he was fighting not only for his own life, but for a hundred other

lives besides; and for honor; and perhaps most of all, for very rage.

The whole power of his soul was awake, and it was blinding to watch how his sword flashed here and there, parrying and thrusting, making two moves for each of the enemy's one.

Most of the time the pace was so swift that the swords could not be seen—only the sparks that flew, and the dazzling glint of the steel in the light, and the fierce clashing that came like the wild notes of swift music.

It was real music, too, the whole fight, mad, drunken music of passion; and it was curious to note the effect of it upon that very sober innkeeper.

At first he had stood coldly, his arms folded, eying it critically with the glance of a connoisseur. He wished to see if the fellow were really a duke, so he muttered to himself, but then as he found out that it was real work he came closer, and grew sympathetic, and

even bent down very suddenly once or twice to note a clever turn of the wrist.

Enthusiasm grew upon him each instant, as it always must upon a man who understands the language of swords, as he saw the poise and strength of soul behind the wild work, the courage and high manhood, to say nothing of the years of training.

A man will tell more about his soul in one minute of his sword play than in an hour by his tongue; and the strange, dark-eyed spectator grew quite beyond himself with wonder and delight before that minute was over.

It was thrilling to see him then, as much so as the fight, for he clenched his hands and bent down, darting from side to side with every movement of Geoffrey, springing back and forth, stabbing this way and that with his empty hand, his eyes glowing and his face alive with energy, his whole being a very picture of excitement and rapture.

"By St. Francis, but it is beautiful!" he cried. "I never saw anything like it! Clever! Superb!"

And so the fierce struggle went on for a minute or two—a time of desperate tension, set to battle music.

Geoffrey's power of soul was waking more savagely with every second; he was more and more master of the scene, and the two men were all but yielding.

He drove his sword at Eugene's breast and drew blood, so that the rejoicing spectator gave a quick cry (though none of the contestants heard it). That stroke would have ended the play had it not been that Geoffrey needed his sword for a swift turn to parry the Italian, who drove his own weapon two inches into the panel of the wall.

It looked like a fearful escape to an untrained spectator, but to the one watcher it was simply a wonderful triumph of art; it was the climax, and it set him quite wild, so

that he leaped up and shook his clenched fists in the air for excess of delight.

"It is beyond words!" he gasped. "I shall never see such a thing again; it is almost a sin to stop it, and yet, by St. Francis, this man is more than a swordsman—he is a duke!"

And with that mine host of the Golden Dog calmly drew sword and advanced to where Geoffrey was still struggling with every nerve and muscle at its highest tension.

He placed himself directly behind the Italian, and put his sword to his neck, striking just hard enough not to cripple him, but to make him scream with pain.

"Turn around here, you black fellow," said the innkeeper; "turn around here and talk to me!"

Giovanni twirled about, and from that instant the conflict of course changed.

From Geoffrey's wild onset Eugene fell back across the room in very terror of his life,

while the Italian retreated from his opponent even more swiftly—though without the latter's abandoning his every-day air of silent gravity.

It was only a second or two more before the two conflicts were ended at the very same instant.

For with a sudden, unexpected movement the innkeeper broke through his antagonist's guard and drove his sword through his body and some inches of the wall beside; while just as the thud was heard, a sudden turn of Geoffrey's wrist sent Eugene's sword flying across the room.

And Geoffrey drew back his own weapon to strike him—when with a lightning move the man leaped aside and pitched through the open window into the darkness beyond!

There was no time to think; Geoffrey was after the man with a blind leap, not two seconds behind him.

It seemed to him as if he were falling for-

ever, but he lighted upon his feet, as it happened, on the pavement of the street below; he saw at the same instant a shadowy form dart around the corner of the house, and sprang away in pursuit, sword in hand.

In another second they were out in the open street, about ten yards apart, and running like the storm wind at their backs.

In an instant it was all clear to Geoffrey—Eugene was making for the palace a quarter of a mile away, and upon his reaching it and upon that alone hung the fate of Sarenne.

There was no time to shout for help—there was no one in the black, stormy street to interfere; it was a clear course and a fair trial. If Geoffrey could win, one sword thrust would save him and his friends and his city; if he lost, no power upon earth could do it.

So they flew on, each giving all his soul to it, giving every ounce of power he possessed to the fearful struggle. The shadowy outlines of the houses whirled past them, everything

seemed to Geoffrey to sway and surge about him.

As he struggled on, he kept all his thoughts upon the question—was the man in front nearer? He fancied that he was; there flashed over him a memory of their boyish races, when he could beat Eugene, and the thought seemed to give him new energy, and to make the distance close up yet faster.

For it was really closing; Eugene saw that it was closing. He saw, too, all of a sudden as it seemed, the trembling lights of the palace break through the rain.

The man raised his voice and shouted in a tone that proved the terror there was in his heart: "Help, help—for Raymond! Open the gates!"

Then once more he settled grimly to his task, and Geoffrey swept on nearer and nearer.

And then suddenly the palace loomed up.

There was a heavy iron gate in the wall, and through it one could see lights flashing.

The fleeing man cried out again as he struggled on; and Geoffrey at his heels made a lunge and touched his clothing.

An instant later, as the building towered above him, Geoffrey saw a dark form dart out and flash toward them, a soldier with a halberd in his hand. It was only a moment more before they met, Eugene fleeing by, panting like a frightened animal.

The man had taken in the situation; it was for Geoffrey that his rush was meant, and he aimed a swift blow at him with his weapon.

The pursuer swerved like lightning and dodged it—drove his sword clean through the man as he passed.

But the half second that it had cost him was fatal to his hopes! For Eugene was through the gate like a flash, and it closed with a sudden clang as Geoffrey flung himself against it with force that almost left him dazed.

CHAPTER X

A BRIMMING CUP OF BITTERNESS

VERY little time had Geoffrey to recover from his confused state of mind, very little to think about the horror of what had happened.

The guards of the palace had apparently feared an attack in force, but they must have discovered from the fugitive that there was only one pursuer, for almost immediately the gate was flung open again, and one of the soldiers rushed out at Geoffrey.

The latter gathered himself together and drove his assailant back, but then, seeing half a dozen others crowding toward him, he turned instinctively to make his escape.

The motion served to awaken him to his position again, to restore some of his scattered faculties.

At first he found himself wondering why

he should wish to get away—whether it would not have been just as well to dash straight in through the open gate and end the struggle there.

There was no longer any chance of killing Eugene, but would it not do just as well to die fighting in the attempt? Surely, no man could be more desperate—all was lost, and there was no longer any hope, or anything further to try.

Yet even as he ran, such is the tenacity of hope, Geoffrey found himself swiftly asking if there might not yet be something better to do than to die where he was.

The first idea which came to him was the meeting, but then he thought that he must be at least half an hour too early for it, and that in any case there would be too few there to hope to withstand Raymond's troops.

At least, however, he might warn them to flee, he thought—might warn Ducluys above all to escape by the wall in the darkness.

But then there came an objection to that—Raymond's troopers would scour the country in the morning, they would murder every man of Geoffrey's sympathizers in the city; worse than that, the cause would be lost, the cause of Sarenne that was more precious than any man's life.

Geoffrey felt that he would die at the stake if he could find any means of undoing the calamity which had just occurred, of keeping from Raymond the fearful message which Eugene was carrying.

And then suddenly as he ran down along the dark wall of the palace, a dozen soldiers at his back, a wild idea flashed over him and made his heart leap like mad.

Was it likely that Eugene would tell his desperate secret to the soldiers in the court—would he not keep it for Raymond's ears alone? Might there not therefore still be time?

Geoffrey was passing a dark, silent house,

and he swerved and flung himself against the door with all his force.

It gave in before him and he dashed blindly up the back stairway—one flight, two—already he heard the troopers at the door as he glided to an open window, where he paused.

There was yet a hope, however desperate! Geoffrey had often calculated from the palace window the chances of what he was going to try now. (He had spent fifteen years of his life in that palace, and he knew every room and every turn of it from top to bottom.) If a man stood in the upper projecting story of this old house, the wall which surrounded the palace was about fifteen feet below him, and only about ten beyond. It was a desperate chance in the semi-darkness, but was not Sarenne worth the try?

He waited until the last of the soldiers had entered the house, until he heard them storming about on the floor below—meantime try-

ing to pierce the gloom and make out the vague shadow of the wall.

At last, when he had not an instant more, when he heard the men almost in the room, he leaped wildly out, and an instant later his foot struck upon the stone wall before him; he was falling backward, but he dropped and caught the wall with his arms as he fell.

In another moment he was standing upon it, and gliding swiftly along.

There were fifty feet or so to run, and then another wild leap, this time not entirely in the darkness, because there was a faint glimmer of light from the window of the palace—a window near a corner of the building that came very close to the wall.

The place was covered with grating to prevent just such a thing as he was doing. But Geoffrey, as he clung to the grating, had in his mind one idea more—that the next window was not barred, and that there was a cornice running to it.

To be sure, this cornice was narrow, a man could not move on it without falling; but the question was, might he not move fast, and, though falling, catch the window sill in time to save himself?

Geoffrey did not fear a fall, for he was perfectly desperate; it was succeed or die with him.

He dared the slippery run, and he caught the sill of the window with his fingers just in the nick of time; then pausing for a moment he slipped quickly inside—into the palace of Raymond!

Geoffrey's first impulse was to stand where he was and gasp for breath, for his fight and his run had all but left him helpless. But the certainty that if his errand was not to be a vain one he must move instantly, prompted him still to keep up the fight.

Yet another inducement to him was the further discovery which he made that there was another person in the room where he stood.

It was too dark for Geoffrey to see, but he could distinctly hear the regular breathing of a sleeping man, and it seemed that the shouting outside could not fail to awake the person soon.

Geoffrey glided swiftly across the room to the door, in the mean time thinking for all his life was worth—thinking of the various passages in the great building, of the rooms where Raymond was most apt to be, and of the way which Eugene was most likely to take.

The instant his mind was made up he ran silently down the dark corridor, until at last he reached a large hallway, where he stopped and crouched in the shadows, panting wildly as he waited.

It could not be long now before he would know whether he were too late, or whether this last desperate venture had been for nothing and all was lost beyond recall.

Then suddenly Geoffrey started and held

his breath; for down the corridor he heard a swift footstep, coming nearer and nearer.

The waiting man peered out, trembling. He could see the distant form veiled in the shadows, and the suspense of the waiting was almost more than he could bear.

He was going to pass a lamp that stood in the hallway; in a moment more it would be possible to see his face. And then like a flash he passed by, and Geoffrey got one glance, and had to clutch the wall to support himself.

It was Eugene!

Yes, Eugene—ghastly pale, stained with blood, panting like a spent hound, but triumphant and on his way to Raymond!

Geoffrey crouched in the shadows, waiting until the other was almost past him, and then he stepped out.

He had no mind to take the risk of a sound, and there was no question of honor with a wretch like this. With one savage

lunge he drove his sword far into the fellow's back, flung him face forward upon the pavement, and leaped back into the shadows.

Sarenne was saved!

The wild surging emotion of relief that swept over Geoffrey was like a deliverance from hell itself.

As he heard that body strike the pavement, it seemed to him as if a black nightmare were lifted from his soul, as if the very walls about him must have cried out with joy.

His fearful error was undone—the awful secret was his own once more!

Geoffrey stood for a few seconds breathing hard and fast, and collecting his thoughts.

He stepped out again and turned the body over with his foot to make quite sure the man was dead, and then he put up his sword and glanced around him.

In the first emotion he had almost no thought of any other peril that might threaten him; he felt as safe as he would have felt

if he were back with Duke Charles in Burgundy.

He was quickly reminded, however, that it was another court he was in, by hearing another footstep in the hall, this time coming from the opposite direction.

It was a heavy stride, and half by intuition it flashed over Geoffrey that it was Raymond. He drew the body of Eugene swiftly back into the narrow passage, where there was an open door leading into another room.

He pushed his victim inside, after which he crouched in the doorway, eagerly waiting.

There were two thoughts in his mind just then—one the very fearful possibility that Eugene might already have told some one his secret, and the other a yet wilder idea—that he might serve this person who was coming in the same way he had served Eugene.

Raymond, too, was a traitor and a murderer besides, a man whom Geoffrey felt to be as

much beyond the pale of honor as had been the dead man who lay near him.

Therefore he stood with his hand upon his sword, waiting while the heavy tread came nearer, and until at last he saw the burly form of Raymond stride past.

The instant he was gone, Geoffrey started to glide out; but he stopped short because he heard another man running swiftly up from the other direction. He stood in the shadows again and listened.

"What is the meaning of all this excitement?" demanded the harsh voice of Raymond.

"It was Monsieur Restand, your grace," answered a voice breathlessly.

"What is the matter with him?"

"He was pursued, your grace; he brought most important news."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know; he hurried this way to meet you."

"I have not seen him; go on, and if you find him, tell him I am out in the court."

And Raymond's stride continued yet more swiftly, while the man ran on in the hall up past Geoffrey. The latter waited until he was out of hearing, and then stole out and started after the duke.

It was too late to hope to catch up with Raymond; he had already hurried down the steps to the floor below. Geoffrey had to give up the plan of attacking him, but still he darted on.

There had been nothing in the other man's words to relieve Geoffrey's mind of one fearful uncertainty, and he meant to have it relieved.

He stole on down the passage, passed the broad stairway, and finally entered into a large room, the hall of state, which he knew he was not apt to find occupied. From a window of it he could look down directly into the court.

He arrived just as Raymond strode out. He marched straight to the captain of the watch, who had come running in at the gate.

"What is the matter here?" the duke demanded.

"Monsieur Restand was attacked by some one, your grace; the bold fellow pursued him to the very gate!"

"And where is he?"

"He escaped, your grace.

"Escaped!"

"Yes, your grace; I followed him with a dozen men, but he dodged into an old house down the street and disappeared. We have searched the place, but have not found him, so far."

"Accursed bungling!" exclaimed Raymond, with an oath of rage. "Who can have dared to attack a guest of mine in my streets? Is it more of this treason?"

"I know not, your grace," answered the

man in fear and trembling. "It is very dark——"

"What did Monsieur Restand have to say to me?" interrupted the other impatiently.

"I know not, your grace; he could not speak, he only cried out to find you. But it must have been something important—I think I never saw a man so excited."

Raymond strode impatiently up and down the court, his spurs clanking upon the pavement, while the soldiers and attendants stood around trembling at his wrath. The wrath grew blacker yet as the straggling men came back, one by one, reporting that the fugitive had escaped, and as Eugene likewise failed to appear with his tidings.

"Where is he, confound him?" cried Raymond wrathfully. "Go and find him, some of you," upon which most of the men who were near him darted into the building, being only too glad to escape the impending storm.

In the mean while Geoffrey crouched at the window, breathing fast and quaffing deep draughts from the cup of relief.

At last he knew he was safe; Eugene's secret had died with him, and the fearful blunder of the night had been retrieved.

The whole situation was just what it had been before, and Geoffrey had only to make his escape from his present dangerous position.

He concluded, as he thought it over, that it would be perilous for him to try to get out by the way he had come; but knowing the palace thoroughly as he did, it was easy for him to devise other ways by which he might accomplish his purpose.

He had risen to his feet, meaning to steal away, when an incident occurred which was to Geoffrey in its suddenness like the bursting of a thunderclap above his head.

A tall form strode out of the building toward the irate duke, and Geoffrey, recognizing it, shot down again to listen.

The conversation which followed was not half a minute in duration, but to the astounded listener it disclosed a situation so appalling that he could scarcely credit his senses.

"A fine tale is this I hear," said the rough voice of Prince Armand. "What do you make of it?"

"Make of it?" exclaimed Raymond. "I know not what to make of it, except that my men are knaves and cowards."

"I know what to make of it," snapped the other; "and I have told you before; you will never have any peace in this accursed palace until you have stamped every traitor in it beneath your feet! And you'll see when it's too late!"

"No, by Heaven, I won't!" cried Raymond. "I have made up my mind, and I mean it. Ducluys has called a meeting of them to-night at eleven at the old council hall, and I mean to capture every man of them in the act!"

"Aha!" exclaimed the other in delight; "there is sport ahead!"

"Yes, by Heaven, there is sport, and you may get your men ready instantly."

Then Raymond stopped for a moment. It would have seemed that he had said enough to confound Geoffrey, for what the latter had heard was like a pistol fired suddenly off in his face; but as it seemed, he had yet one more piece of news to hear, one which was like a new crash that drowned the other completely and wrought confusion ten times increased in his mind.

Raymond had been striding up and down clenching his hands; suddenly he stopped opposite his son and said: "I've given old Ducluys enough inducements this morning to keep him quiet, I'm quite sure; but if not, I'll teach the whole of them a lesson to-night that Sarenne will not soon forget!"

The two men remained in the court but a moment after that; the duke turned

suddenly exclaiming: "What's the matter with that fellow Restand? I must find him myself!" and proceeded into the building.

He left Geoffrey cowering by the window-sill, limp and trembling.

It was as if a yawning pit had opened beneath him; everything about him seemed to reel and turn black. There was but one possible construction to be put upon Raymond's words: he was in another trap, and Ducluys was a traitor, too!

In the first place, Raymond knew of the meeting. And those last words—"I've given old Ducluys enough inducements this morning to keep him quiet." So *that* was the meaning of Raymond's visit; and Ducluys' curt explanation to Geoffrey—"idle threats!"

Geoffrey had of course no suspicion of the truth; he thought that Victor Ducluys was dead.

"Merciful Lord!" he groaned, his voice choking. "Whom can I trust?"

The discovery of Eugene's almost diabolical falseness had not been enough; all the world must turn against him, must show itself black-hearted and foul.

Geoffrey's first feelings were of utter despair, of complete indifference as to what might befall him. He thought of giving up everything, of leaving Sarenne and its traitors to tear at each other's throats.

"Who could have dreamed such a thing?" he gasped.

He went on to think of how the old man had deceived him, of the cunning with which he had played his part; and then a sudden rage took possession of Geoffrey, and he leaped to his feet, his hands clenched and his frame quivering.

"By Heaven," he muttered to himself, "there is no punishment on earth could pay for such a crime as that! It is worse than

Raymond's! Oh, is all the world like that? What can I do—where can I find a true heart in all this fearful city!"

Then all at once his swiftly flying thoughts, having passed over all the events that had happened to him since his arrival, came suddenly to a new image: he saw Marguerite as she stood before him and poured out her heart to him as he left.

"Great God," he panted, "can she be a traitor too?"

But fearfully though Geoffrey's faith had been shaken, his heart revolted from such an idea as that. He clenched his hands with sudden passion, whispering hoarsely to himself:

"No, no! It cannot be, it cannot be! I could believe anything but that; if I knew that were so I would die—I could no more bear to look upon men! She is true to me, she must be—perhaps she knew it, and dared not tell."

And Geoffrey sprang forward with a sudden start.

"She shall tell!" he exclaimed. "She must! And I will trust her; I cannot believe there was a lie in that girl's soul when she spoke to me!"

So possessed was the man with his sudden fierce resolution that he quite forgot where he was; he rushed wildly out into the hall and started away.

But he had taken only about a dozen steps when he was startled by hearing a yell far down the hallway, in the voice of Raymond.

"Armand, come here! By the Lord, some one has murdered Restand!"

CHAPTER XI

FROM DOUBT TO DANGER

The cry galvanized Geoffrey's senses into life; he was once more aware of his danger, and once more on the alert.

He darted back into the deserted room and made his way swiftly along the wall to the far end, where there was a doorway opening out into a corridor. The castle was in an uproar by this time, men rushing in every direction and shouting; two dashed by Geoffrey, running in the direction of Raymond's hail.

After that, however, all seemed quiet, and he darted out and went to a window at the end of the passage which opened into a deserted corner of the court.

The fugitive slid out and dropped lightly to the ground. Near by was a shed leaning

against the wall, and up this he clambered quickly.

He made some noise in doing it, and he heard a shout behind him, and saw two men run toward him.

But Geoffrey was upon the wall and over it before their cries could have any effect. He darted down an alley between two buildings, and was soon lost in the darkness.

After that he had but one thought, and he ran like mad through the blinding storm, finding his way half by instinct, and with all his soul centered upon one purpose—that of laying bare his heart to Marguerite and demanding the truth from her.

It was only a few moments more before he reached Ducluys' house and thundered upon the door.

The knock was answered by the frightened Pierre, who evidently thought it another visit of Raymond. He recognized Geoffrey's voice,

however, and opened the door in consternation.

"Is Ducluys in?" the young man panted.

"No, your grace," was the reply; "he left fifteen minutes ago to meet you."

"Yes," said Geoffrey; "is his daughter here?"

"Yes, your grace, she——"

"Where is she? Ask her to see me! Quick!"

And Geoffrey followed the servant upstairs.

In a moment or two more the astounded girl was confronted by the wild figure, breathless, gasping, and white.

"Your grace," she cried in terror, "what has happened?"

Geoffrey stood for a moment struggling for breath; then he turned and shut the door.

He came nearer to the girl, his keen eyes fixed upon hers as if he would have read into the depths of her soul. "Marguerite," he

whispered, suddenly and hoarsely, "are *you* true?"

The girl was too much surprised to answer; and the other after a moment went on impetuously.

"Marguerite, to-day when I left you spoke to me so nobly that you made my soul bow down to you, and your words have haunted me. Now, when I am in despair, when I can find no true heart in the world, I have come to you—*you*—to tell me the truth. If you are false, before God I will die—I give up—I can bear it no more!"

He staggered back, clutching at a chair.

"Your grace," cried the girl in wild alarm, "what can you mean? Who has been false to you?"

"Marguerite, do you not know who has been false to me?"

"No!" said the girl, in open-eyed wonder. "Do you mean this Eugene?"

"Yes," panted Geoffrey; "I mean him!

And I mean another, too—I mean your father!"

Marguerite gave a wild start, and there came a look upon her face that was fearful to see.

"My father!" she half screamed. "You are mad!"

"No, no!" cried the other. "It is true—you cannot persuade me! But yet—oh, how can it be?"

The girl clenched her hands and shut her lips for an instant. Then she opened them to demand in a hard voice:

"What has brought your grace to this opinion?"

Geoffrey then told her swiftly what had happened. The girl listened in wonder, but as he repeated the words he had heard from Raymond a sudden look of comprehension crossed her face, and the anger left it.

She started forward as Geoffrey stopped, and sank upon her knees before him.

"Your grace," she began in a pleading tone, "make me one promise—do not let this fearful thing go any farther; do not tell my father of this awful scene with me. Let it be our secret—it would be more than he could bear that you should believe such a frightful thing of him after all he has done."

Geoffrey gazed at her in perplexity.

"What do you mean?" he cried faintly.

The girl sprang to her feet.

"Listen to me," she exclaimed. "Listen; you said you believed in me—*do* you believe in me?"

"Yes," panted Geoffrey. "Yes, I do."

"Well, then, believe in me now when I tell you that this thing is a fearful misunderstanding, that such a suspicion is too cruel to have passed your lips! Believe this one thing and ask me no more about it; believe that I know what Raymond's words meant, and know what my father is doing!"

"But tell me," gasped the man. "What *is* he doing?"

The girl was silent for a moment, her eyes bent upon him; then she said in a low tone: "Your grace, the last word I said to my father as he left this house was a solemn promise that under no circumstances would I tell you what you ask to know."

The other fixed his wondering glance upon her.

"So you will not tell me?" he whispered hoarsely.

With a sudden impulse, Marguerite came yet a step nearer to Geoffrey, laid one of her hands upon his arm, saying in a pleading voice: "Will your grace *ask* me to tell? Why will you not trust me?"

He gazed into her eyes that were so deep and steady.

"What do you know?" he asked in a low voice. "Do you know how Raymond learned of to-night's meeting?"

"No," was the answer, "that I do not know; but I know one thing about it, that it was not through my father that he learned it for I know my father's heart as I know my own. But as to Raymond's visit here, I heard every word the man said, and I know all my father's actions and what they mean—I know what Raymond's words meant, and just why my father made me swear not to tell you.

"I know, moreover, that if I did I would imperil your cause just as much as you are imperiling it by your doubt. I know that my father's soul is as true as your own; I know that he would give his life for you——"

The girl stopped short; she had been speaking with impassioned energy, but now as she went on her voice was trembling and low. "I know that he would give *more* than his life," she added.

Geoffrey had still been gazing deep into the girl's eyes as she pleaded with him thus.

There was a long pause, then she whispered: "Will you not believe me? Will you not go on—act just as you would have acted had you never heard Raymond's words? Will you not trust my father, and fight, and win?"

She paused for a second, and then added in a pleading tone, "And because *I* ask you?"

Geoffrey's hand trembled as the girl laid hers gently upon it; he was still staring at her wildly.

Then he whispered slowly, "You ask me to put my life in your hands!"

"Yes," said she gently.

He gazed but a moment more into her noble face, then he sank upon one knee, and as he bent over her hand she felt hot tears upon it.

"Marguerite," he whispered, "pardon me—say nothing about it. I believe you."

There was a moment's silence. Geoffrey's eyes were still fixed on the girl.

"Your grace is weary," she said; and then as another thought flashed over her she added, "Yet listen—is not your presence needed at that meeting?"

The man leaped to his feet with a cry of horror.

"God save me!" he gasped; "I had forgotten!"

Geoffrey whirled about and gazed at the clock. It was ten minutes to eleven.

"They are lost," he panted; "they are lost! Raymond has gone to surprise them!"

The girl gave a scream.

"Oh, quick!" she cried. "Save them! What have we done?"

Geoffrey rushed to the door, and in another moment he had leaped down the stairs and out into the night and was racing through the streets.

The man was almost beside himself as he thought of his carelessness and realized the dreadful consequences of it. He had heard

Raymond's threat to overwhelm the conspirators, and he might have saved them, and yet he had so far lost his head with the other possibility that he had not done it—had not even remembered it!

Geoffrey had done a good deal of running that night, but he put every ounce of his remaining strength into that last dash. He was quite desperate, and he had one very clear purpose in his mind.

He could not hope that he would arrive before Raymond, but at least he might share the fate of his friends in the struggle that must follow.

So he sped on through the darkness and storm, nearer and nearer the scene of the fatal meeting. Then all of a sudden he heard the striking of a horse's hoofs on the pavement ahead, and thought in a flash that he was overtaking some of Prince Armand's troopers on their way to the place.

Geoffrey gripped his hands and sped on,

muttering grimly to himself: "Very well! I shall take my chances for outstripping them!"

But he soon found that he had made a mistake in his surmise. The horses were not advancing, they were standing still, a great number of them, so that they almost blocked the street.

The desperate man realized the truth as the dark forms loomed up in front of him; it was only some fifty yards more to the council hall. The troopers had left their horses here and gone on!

Geoffrey's course of action was chosen forthwith. He dashed straight on, wild and breathless, threading his way through the group of animals.

He ran straight into one of the soldiers who had been left to tend them, and the fellow gave a cry of alarm; but Geoffrey bounded on into the darkness, and in a few seconds was clear of the place and speeding on down the street.

He dashed straight toward the old council hall, reckless of everything. There was a group of men in the middle of the street just in front of it—he swerved and flew past them; there was another group crouching by the corner of the inn—they hailed him sharply, but he paid no attention to that. He would not have stopped for Raymond himself. He rushed straight into the alley between the two buildings, with just one thought in his mind —that somehow or other he must get into that building!

At the other end of the narrow passage he made out another crowd of men coming swiftly toward him; he saw at the same instant, however, how he might achieve his purpose, and he was quick enough to do it.

A window of the council hall was open, as he had in fact expected, and he bounded in. All was black and silent and deserted where he stood, but Geoffrey knew where the staircase ran,

He lost not a second, but darted swiftly up and burst into the main shadowy hall, lit by a single faint lantern on the wall.

Fifty startled faces turned to him as he stood in the doorway swaying from excitement.

"Men of Sarenne, prepare to fight," he panted amid a death-like silence. "We are surrounded by Raymond's troops!"

CHAPTER XII

AT A DESPERATE PASS

THE members of that suddenly interrupted meeting stood staring at one another in utter confusion, for Geoffrey's announcement had come on them like a thunderbolt. They were all, however, men used to facing danger, and no one of them showed fear.

Geoffrey stood but a moment to catch his breath, and then he stepped forward and spoke.

There was no time for greetings or formalities; his words were swift and to the point.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Raymond's men were all about us as I came, and no doubt he has taken pains to surround us entirely, so that there can be no avoiding him. I presume that no man here has thought of sur-

rendering; it means a fight. How many agree?"

There was not a sound made, but every man took a step forward.

"Very well, then," went on Geoffrey swiftly, "let it be so. Some one go downstairs quickly and close the iron shutters of the window. That may give us an instant to think."

Several of the men darted out of the room, and Geoffrey went on.

"There is but one thing to add. This surprise means that our rising must be attempted now instead of to-morrow night. I do not know what our chances of victory are—we are caught at a disadvantage; but I rely upon every man here to do his best. We shall be caught like rats in a trap if we stay here, and cannot hope to defend ourselves successfully against the numbers Raymond can hurl against us."

A faint murmur ran around the room, and

Geoffrey continued, the fire of his energy and resolution kindling the men who crowded about him.

"Of course our one hope is to fight our way out and rouse the city. We will open the door and break through the enemy if we can. I choose the north door; I came from that direction, and the troopers' horses are there.

"Let every man have one thought in mind —to mount and ride for life to rouse the town. Choose different streets and shout for your lives; bring every man you can pick up, and meet me in fifteen minutes in front of Ducluys' house. And God help us! That is all."

Then, while a thrill of wild emotion surged through the desperate crowd, Geoffrey turned and strode to the steps in solemn silence; each one of them knew that he was marching to face overwhelming odds, knew that few indeed of the little crowd could hope to escape alive.

At the bottom of the steps they found that the shutters had been closed without any of Raymond's men noticing it, so that none of the enemy had as yet entered the building.

No word was said as Geoffrey strode grimly to the door he had just mentioned; the devoted band drew up in a close body behind him, and he laid his hand upon the bolt.

Every man had sword drawn and tightly clenched; they crouched half involuntarily for the rush that was to follow. They knew that the opening of the door would be the signal for a wild struggle that would burst like thunder upon the silence of the night.

"Ready," said Geoffrey in a low whisper; and turned to the bolt.

But at that instant a strange thing occurred, causing Geoffrey to face about again quickly. A tall figure had glided silently out of the blackness of the room and halted in front of him.

A vague feeling of recognition flashed over

Geoffrey at the first glance, turning to certainty as the person spoke.

It was the landlord of the Golden Dog.

"Gentlemen," he said, "yours is a right brave resolution, but by no means the wisest. You will not accomplish much against Raymond to-night."

There was a dead silence in the room; the whole party was struck with astonishment, for although, with the exception of Geoffrey, none of them could see who the stranger was, they were sure the voice came from none of their own members.

"Listen," went on the man quietly; "to-night you have none of your retainers; you are a scant fifty men, and Raymond's troopers are on the alert. You will be overmatched before the town can rise, and besides, what of your plan to lure Raymond from the city before you attack?"

There was another wondering silence. At last came the voice of Ducluys.

"Your grace, in Heaven's name who is this person?"

"I know him," answered Geoffrey briefly; then he turned to the newcomer.

"We do not fight Raymond to-night because we wish to, he said; we would be very glad to do otherwise."

"If your grace would but surrender your leadership to me," went on the other gravely, "I assure you the affair would be better managed."

Nobody knew quite what to say to this remark; but Geoffrey felt assured that his strange acquaintance was not a man to use idle words; and the man must have known that he knew it too. For, after a moment's pause, the latter turned, vouchsafing only one quiet word, "Come!" And Geoffrey faced about without replying, and followed him, the rest of the astounded party bringing up the rear.

They passed back into the hall, and the

new leader opened another door, disclosing a staircase to the cellar.

He stopped and calmly lit his lantern, while the crowd behind him writhed with impatience, and then led them down.

The space below proved to be full of kegs and barrels of all sorts, smelling strongly of wine and spirits. The man found a path through the obstacles, leading far across the full length of the building, at the end of which was an opening in the masonry of the foundation wall.

This was fitted with an iron door, which the host opened. He and Geoffrey halted, while the others, in obedience to the stranger's quiet suggestion, passed through.

"Where does this lead to?" asked Geoffrey.

"To the cellar of my inn," was the quiet reply.

"But how does it come to exist?"

"I shall have to petition your grace for clemency," was the innkeeper's meek re-

sponse. He was leaning carelessly upon a keg and watching the conspirators file through. "My wife has been for seven years predicting my imprisonment for this offense; but when Raymond came to Sarenne I knew that it would be long before the council house was used, and because I needed a larger cellar I dug this opening. I little thought that I would have to conduct your grace to it myself!"

"I will pardon you," answered Geoffrey, unable to keep from smiling.

At this moment there came a trampling upon the floor above their heads, which told them that Raymond had at last entered the building.

The innkeeper showed no signs of alarm, however; he bade some of the men help him pile the kegs in front of the entrance, and then locked the door, which effectually shut out all sounds from the neighboring building.

"We are quite safe here for a few minutes,

so let us make ourselves comfortable; your grace seems out of breath."

"Raymond will certainly search the cellar and the inn!" exclaimed Geoffrey.

"I know," said the other calmly, but we will have made our escape before that, of course. It will be best to wait a minute or two, however, before we try it, simply because more of Raymond's men will have crowded into the building then."

The company accordingly remained in silence for a short time, lighted by the single lantern of their strange rescuer.

It was only the latter who seemed minded to talk. He bent toward Geoffrey suddenly and whispered, "That fellow got away with his news?"

"No," was the answer, "I killed him!" a reply which caused the host to give what was no doubt quite a violent start for him.

"Then this meeting was betrayed!" he whispered.

"Yes," said Geoffrey, and with a sudden thought he drew old Ducluys to his side. "Have you any idea how Raymond learned of our appointment?" he asked.

The old man answered in a manner which surprised Geoffrey, and his trembling voice made evident that the words pained the speaker not a little.

"Yes, your grace," he said; "I am afraid I do know how it occurred."

"What!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "How do you mean?"

"This afternoon, while I was talking to one of these men in my house, I heard the door of the secret passage click as it closed. I thought it must be you or Gaston, and paid no attention to it; but the instant I heard that Raymond was here, I knew that I had made a fearful mistake. Very certainly, your grace, that spy was listening again!"

"But Gaston and I were watching at the

other end of the tunnel!" protested Geoffrey in amazement.

"I know it, your grace; but it must be that while you were sleeping Gaston did not keep careful watch. I can think of no other possible explanation for this dreadful mischance."

A thought of Geoffrey's old suspicion came back to him, but he put it away; it was not possible to look into Ducluys' face and believe him a traitor.

"It must be so," the young man muttered; "it could not have happened otherwise. Yet it seems almost impossible. I shall not rest until I catch that villainous spy and make him tell me with his own lips how he succeeded!"

The innkeeper had been listening in silence to this conversation. Now he asked, "Are the full number of those you visited here?"

"They are," said Ducluys; and Geoffrey comprehended the other's thought—that it was not likely a traitor was among them; such

a man would surely have remained away, for in the battle in the dark he would have been very apt to share the fate of those he betrayed.

A moment later the innkeeper rose and said in a somewhat louder tone: "I think, gentlemen, it is time for us to leave. I need not stop to warn you to be silent. What does your grace intend to do," he asked, turning to Geoffrey, "after we are free from Raymond's men?"

"We will be quite lucky if we can depart safely for our homes," put in Ducluys impatiently.

"You came to hold a meeting," retorted the imperturbable host; "why not do it, your grace? You must have much to say to your friends, and there are many plans to be made, if the rising is to occur to-morrow night, as it most certainly should. Besides that, I myself, if I can have the chance, have some news to give you that I think you would find worth while."

The men of the party were staring at their new and mysterious leader in silent wonder; but he saw nothing of it; his grave glance was fixed upon Geoffrey.

The latter's heart leaped within him at the presence of such cool resolution as this, and he gazed at the man with eager delight.

"Do you mean to return to the council house?" he cried.

"No, your grace," the other answered quietly. "It was an exceedingly unwise place to choose in the beginning. If your grace cares to trust yourself to my guidance, I can conduct you to a spot where you will certainly not be overheard or disturbed."

And Geoffrey impulsively sprang forward, and caught the man by the arm.

"Come," he cried; "lead on!"

"Very well, your grace," was the innkeeper's reply; "but I pray you not to hurry me, because I have an ankle which gives me a great deal of pain. I leaped from that window, too.

Perhaps you wondered why I was not in the race?"

"I never thought of it!" laughed Geoffrey. "But by St. Benedict, I know one thing, you shall command my army if I ever have one."

"I could not leave my inn," was the grave reply, as the man moved toward the steps.

He extinguished the lantern and silently opened the door. The moment that he did so shouts were heard, showing that the troopers had discovered the absence of their prey.

The leader paid no attention to them, however, but, followed by the silent line of men, proceeded to the rear of the building and opened a door leading into a little stone-walled garden.

They crept along the wall, not a dozen feet away from the yelling soldiers on the other side, but secured from discovery by the darkness and the storm. They moved swiftly on

to the end of the garden, about fifty yards beyond, where the landlord found an empty keg upon which he stepped and sprang swiftly over into another yard.

It was impossible to make out the houses about them; but the leader knew the land perfectly, and he led them over innumerable fences and across several court yards, until at last they reached a place where, motioning for silence, he stopped and opened a door in the wall.

The wisdom of the cool-headed wait in the cellar was seen then, for at this distance from the council house not a person was in sight. If there had been any of the soldiers posted thereabouts, the cries from the hall must have drawn them away.

The party glided out into the dark and narrow alley and sped swiftly on without molestation, the innkeeper still in the lead. Nothing opposed their progress but the raging storm, and in a minute or two, as the sounds

from Raymond's men died away, the whole company knew that they were safe.

A few moments after, their leader stopped short, and said in a low tone, "Gentlemen, this is our destination."

CHAPTER XIII

A FAITHFUL ALLY

The men glanced curiously at the house, a little cobbler shop with which they were all more or less familiar.

Their guide begged assistance from one of the party, mounted upon his shoulders, and tapped lightly three times upon the window of the second floor.

It could not have been one minute more before the weazened face of the occupant of the house was peering out of the doorway into the darkness, staring blankly at the crowd and hurriedly slipping on his coat meanwhile.

The leader passed in without vouchsafing any explanation, except that as he entered the door Geoffrey heard him whisper softly to the man, "Pass the word."

The company stumbled up the dark steps and into a room in the front of the house, where there was scarcely space for them all to crowd.

The innkeeper made a light, with the remark, "And now, gentlemen, we are perfectly safe, and may do what we choose, provided no noise is made."

Before Geoffrey's arrival at the meeting place, Ducluys had been making known that the time for the struggle was near, but he had meant to let the young duke announce his own presence. They crowded around him now to welcome him, and to ask an account of his experiences, though he was so exhausted after all he had gone through that it was hard for him to tell a coherent tale.

There was another object of no little interest to the party—their strange rescuer, who sat with knitted brows, buried in his own thoughts, and apparently oblivious to every

one around him—a tall, impressive-looking man, with a black mantle wrapped about his slender form.

It was not until Geoffrey rose to address his friends that the other seemed to realize what was going on around him.

"We ought to waste no time," Geoffrey began; "we have much to discuss to-night."

Then, as all turned to listen to him, the stranger said slowly: "Your grace, I do not wish to force myself on your attention or on that of these gentlemen; but there is something of importance that I should like to say to you before you begin, if you will grant me five minutes of your time."

Geoffrey assented wonderingly, and the others crowded forward.

The man seated himself easily upon the edge of a table, gazing about him with steady gaze, and not in the least embarrassed by the fact that fifty of Sarenne's nobility were staring him in the face.

"Your grace," he said, "you must pardon me, because to tell you what I have in mind I must first tell you about myself. My name is André Chatrier; I come from Picardy; I have been a soldier of fortune all my life; I served King Francis, and I served the emperor against the Turks.

"But a man who thinks wearies of killing his fellows when those who lead him do not know why they are doing it; and I was minded to live in peace and watch the strange game of life. I came to Sarenne about eight years ago, because I heard that its duke believed in justice. I kept an inn because a man must needs do something.

"Then Raymond came, as we all know; I was not pleased with Raymond, but yet I stayed. It was not because I loved Sarenne, it was because I had my inn. But I had come to live in peace, and I soon found that a man cannot live in peace while he hates any one as I came to hate Raymond,

"I was a quiet man; nobody in Sarenne ever heard me say what I thought, and because I minded my own business, Raymond never heard of me. But as I stood at my inn door I used to see many things—I saw the Duke of Sarenne murdered; I saw shops pillaged, and men driven from the city because they would not pay Raymond's taxes; I saw with my own eyes a neighbor across the way struck down because he got in the way of Raymond's horse. And so I found that little by little I was being dragged back into the life of fighting."

The speaker paused for a moment and gazed around him at this eagerly attentive audience. Then he went on slowly:

"Gentlemen do not as a rule care to have innkeepers assert themselves, but the circumstances must justify me in this case. I saw nobody to do the work, and so I took charge of things myself.

"I watched, and whenever I knew of a man

who was writhing beneath some wrong of Raymond's, I used to stroll around and make his acquaintance. I never talked to him much—I let him do all the talking.

"If I found him too ready, or if I found he had a wife who asked questions, I went away again; if he was the kind of person I wanted, I became very intimate with him, and afterward, when I knew everything about him, if he suited me I told him what I was doing.

"I laid before him the fact that the heir of Sarenne was coming some day, and that there being but one of him, he was a very precious person; that Raymond would have many troops, and that therefore I meant, being an old soldier who knew all about such things, to get together a body of men who would pledge themselves to absolute secrecy and fidelity, and be ready when the time came to give their lives if need be."

The man paused, and this time as he gazed

about him, a murmur of excitement ran round the room.

"Go on," said Geoffrey eagerly, and a slight smile crossed the other's face.

"It was a strange task, your grace," he continued, "that of an innkeeper nourishing a secret society upon hope for seven years. It has made me a very busy innkeeper since I began.

"For one thing, I chose all my men from the plain people of the town; I knew that the gentlemen would not give way to me, though I knew also that I knew a great deal more about the matter than the gentlemen. I set to work to make a regiment out of the artisans and tradesmen. Very few of them I found knew how a sword felt.

"I took each one as I caught him, and I cleared out a place in the cellar of my inn, and there for an hour every day I made him learn to fight. I never gave him up until he could stand before me, and I kept that up at the rate of about one man a month for some

six years, so that now, if your grace and these gentlemen of Sarenne do not scorn the help of traders, I have a band of men who can keep a secret and face the best troopers that Raymond can hire—men, besides, who have sworn to fight and die, if need be, for Duke Geoffrey of Sarenne."

This very grave innkeeper had been speaking calmly and without emotion, but as he stopped, a subdued cry of admiration and delight broke from the men in the room, and Geoffrey sprang forward, exclaiming, "Monsieur Chatrier, you have saved my life twice; you will save it again now!"

"I shall do my very best," your grace, was the response. "I am happy if my work pleases you."

Many others crowded around to pour out their congratulations, the strange man listening of course with due politeness; but he found an opportunity at last to interrupt gently.

"I wished to say what I have to you, gentlemen," he remarked, "before you discuss your plans. These men should know of them too, it seems to me, if you are willing to trust them."

"Call them together," said Geoffrey quickly; "your word shall go for them all."

"Your grace," the other answered, "I knew none of your friends and nothing of your plans, and so I believed that the need for these men was apt to be immediate. Therefore I made a system by which all might be warned to assemble, and I calculated that it would take about ten minutes; I gave the signal when we entered—I think that time has now elapsed."

He strode to the rear door of the room and flung it open; behind it was another and larger apartment, into which were crowded some four score armed men.

The two parties stood staring at each other in wonder, until suddenly a figure advanced

from among the gentlemen in the front room, and Chatrier, in the doorway, said in a low, calm voice, "Duke Geoffrey of Sarenne!"

It was wonderful to note the wild thrill that shook that crowd. The men leaped forward in a flash, tense with excitement, so that the innkeeper had to say, still in his quiet way:

"Speak to them, your grace; do not let them make a noise."

And Geoffrey spoke to them; his heart stirred by the sight of such faith and devotion, and he thanked them with all his soul.

He went on to pour out his enthusiasm to them, to tell of the years in which he, too, had been training for this hour, and of the longing with which he had waited for it. Turning first to one room and then to the other, he declared that his life was pledged to this task; that he had come to drive out tyranny and injustice, and that his cause was one with that of every true man in Sarenne.

"My friends," he cried as he finished, "I want no selfish man with me, and no coward; I want men who are resolved to live as free men or not to live at all. I want to know that every man who goes with me goes as I go, to stake all upon the struggle, to drive every thought from his heart but the thought of victory or death."

Every word that Geoffrey spoke thrilled his hearers, and the little rooms seemed fairly bursting with their tense excitement.

But these men knew too well where they were, and a dull murmur took the place of a shout that would otherwise have welcomed the speech, and told the speaker that every heart in the room was his.

Afterward the men set quickly to work discussing their plans.

It was evident from what Geoffrey had heard Raymond say that he knew nothing of the former's presence, and so there was no danger in their waiting till the following day.

It was too late to attempt the work that night, so it was decided in the first place that a score of men were to pass out of the city on the morrow, and at half-past eleven at night should begin a raid upon the farms outside, setting fire to every building they could. Meantime, as soon as Raymond had gone to the attack, a party under Ducluys would storm the gate and hold it; while Chatrier and his men would join Geoffrey and the main body in storming the castle.

It was found that the gentlemen with their households and the other band would make in all a body of some three hundred men. There was much discussion regarding the numbers to which it would be safe to augment this force. It was finally decided that both Geoffrey and Chatrier should at once, in consultation with their followers, make out lists of probably faithful men; that three such should be allotted to every man in the party; and that ten minutes should be allowed after

Raymond and his troopers left in which each might notify these persons.

The moment the rising began, parties were to ride through the city, shouting the cry of Geoffrey, and calling all to the palace, where the main struggle was to take place.

It was far on toward morning when at last the patriots separated until the hour of action should come—carefully leaving a few at a time, so as to attract no attention.

Geoffrey thanked his new ally, the innkeeper, with all his heart for his devotion, and then set out with Ducluys and three or four of the others for home.

The closely-wrapped figures strode along in silence through the quiet streets that were gray with the first glimmer of dawn; they felt now that they had said and done all they could do, and that their fate was in the hand of God.

CHAPTER XIV

FACE TO FACE WITH THE SPY

"It would be best for all to stay quietly at home through the day," said Geoffrey. "Raymond may feel a bit angry at the way we escaped him and spoiled Prince Armand's sport."

Geoffrey did not go all the way with his friends, for as they passed the house in which was the entrance to the tunnel he stopped, saying that he wished to see a friend. Ducluys understood and passed on with the men.

Geoffrey meant to do what he could to solve the mystery of the spy, for he felt that he could not be safe even through the day if that man were still watching the house. Besides that, it had occurred to him that it might have been after his own departure to

see Eugene that the fellow had come, and that he had succeeded in making his discovery only by overpowering Gaston.

Geoffrey's mind was soon relieved upon the last point, however, for as he knocked lightly upon the window and whispered his friend's name, the signal was immediately answered. He opened the shutter and crept in.

"Well, what is the news?" Gaston whispered eagerly.

"Come, and I will tell you," was Geoffrey's answer, as he drew the man swiftly into the dark room by the passage door. "Gaston, the spy had learned of the meeting!"

The other staggered back with a cry of consternation.

Geoffrey then told his breathless auditor in a few words the wild tale of what had occurred. "Gaston," he added, "as sure as fate that man came by this passage!"

"Your grace," cried the man vehemently, "it cannot be! It is absurd!"

"But it is true, it must be so! You must have dropped asleep!"

The man fell upon his knee before his lord.

"Your grace doubts my word!" he cried.

"No, dear Gaston, but you may have——"

"Your grace," went on the other passionately, "I swear to you that there was not one instant of the time while you were sleeping that I did not watch the door! And I have watched it all this night! Even at the times when you watched I slept with my body across the entrance. Your grace, I could stake my soul upon it, that spy did not pass by this entrance!"

Geoffrey sat gazing before him in helpless wonder.

"What can this thing mean then, Gaston?" he whispered.

"I know not," groaned the man in despair. "It is more than I can bear."

"Listen," went on the duke, springing up

with a sudden vehemence, "this thing cannot continue—the truth must be learned! A dozen times this scoundrel has nearly wrecked us—it has been by the merest chance that we have escaped him. And we are not safe from him now, every plan that we have made may be ruined in a moment! Gaston, it would be a crime to let ourselves be beaten by such as he—now, when we are at the very gates of victory."

"What can we do, your grace?" cried the other.

Geoffrey had begun to stride swiftly up and down. "I know the one thing," he exclaimed; "at least, we have been safe here, the spy has not discovered *us!* Gaston, we shall not enter Ducluys' house throughout the day; and Ducluys will do no talking, and so the spy may spy all he likes!"

Geoffrey sprang toward the passage.

"I will tell him that now," he said. "Gaston, you watch here until I return."

"Will you not let me go, your grace?" the other asked anxiously.

"No, I wish to see Ducluys myself," was the reply, "and make him realize the state of affairs. It will take but a few moments, and then all will be well."

Geoffrey opened the secret doors and entered the passage, closing them behind him.

It was pitch dark, but he strode boldly forward, for he knew the place by this time.

Meanwhile, in his mind he was striving desperately to think of some explanation of the fearful mystery. He shuddered as he thought of the possibility of all his plans being wrecked.

"The traitor cannot be Ducluys," he muttered, "and it cannot be Gaston; in Heaven's name, who can it be?"

Curiously enough, in his perplexity and excitement, he had not once thought of the possible presence of the man at that moment. Thus it happened that an event which sud-

denly occurred came to him as an utter surprise, and made him stop short as if he felt a sword at his breast.

He had heard a sound in the passage!

It was dark, he could see nothing, but he crouched and listened, his heart throbbing wildly.

He put out his hands and found that he had reached a place in the tunnel where it ran along the foundation wall of some house; and an instant later, as Geoffrey watched, there suddenly flashed a light out into the passage, and he saw that a stone in the wall had swung back, and that a man with a lantern was crawling slowly through!

In the surging thoughts that filled Geoffrey's mind, the wildest of them were of triumph. So *this* was it—the dreadful problem was solved! And he knelt quivering in every limb, and waiting until the stranger had made his entrance and was standing erect within the tunnel.

The watcher had not seen the man's face; it had been turned away. But he knew the figure; it was really the spy.

And then suddenly the man half confronted him, and Geoffrey gave a wild start.

"La Farge!" he gasped to himself. "My father's steward!"

The man was alone. He turned, and, setting down the lantern, closed the secret door with a snap; and at the same instant Geoffrey bounded forward, whipping his sword from its scabbard with the hoarse cry, "Scoundrel —so it is you!"

The man stood as if turned to stone, his face white with terror.

"You know me, La Farge?" cried Geoffrey, seeing his look.

The man did know him, but he was too much dazed and too much terrified to do anything but gasp. The other meanwhile was hurrying on impetuously.

"So it is you who were the traitor that has

almost ruined my plans—you, whom my father raised and cared for from boyhood, whom he trusted as he would a friend! I and my friends have been balked and beaten by you—my life has almost gone for *you!* La Farge one of Raymond's men—spying upon all that he owed faith to—and for years —for years! By the Lord above you, La Farge, what fiend has mastered your soul?"

The man had stood quivering from head to foot, his lips white and his teeth rattling, as Geoffrey thundered at him.

There was an instant's silence, in which he tried to speak; then Geoffrey came a step nearer, his sword in his hand, and continued in a fierce whisper:

"Etienne La Farge, traitor and dastard, shall I strike you down as you stand, or will you dare to fight your lord and master face to face?"

The man gazed up and saw the look of wrath upon Geoffrey's face; then suddenly

he leaped back with a burst of desperate courage.

"If I must die," he panted, drawing his sword, "I will fight!"

And the next instant Geoffrey had bounded at him, and there was a sharp clash of steel.

As the young duke, his whole soul ablaze with wrath, pressed after him, the man yielded, step by step; but the other only leaped to the attack more fiercely.

The weapons rang loud and swift, till suddenly Geoffrey, with a quick turn, beat down his opponent's guard and aimed a fierce thrust to end the contest.

There was a thud, and then a sharp snap; and Geoffrey's sword, broken short off by a crash against the other's hilt, fell useless to the ground.

There was an instant's pause, during which both men stood half dazed by the sudden event, the traitor crouching and staring, and Geoffrey clutching the useless handle.

Then suddenly he gripped his hands and his form seemed to rear itself with a new dignity. He dropped the hilt of his sword, and folded his arms.

His face was unmoved, as he fixed his gaze sternly on the other.

"La Farge," he said, "you may strike!"

CHAPTER XV

A CRITICAL MOMENT

THERE was a long pause in the silent passage after Geoffrey's last word.

He expected La Farge to spring at him every instant, but the man did not do it. It was as if his sudden triumph was too great for him to realize all at once.

Geoffrey watched him in calm self-possession, as the other crouched and clutched his sword, his face gleaming in the light of the lamp.

"Do you surrender?" the young man heard him whisper suddenly; and Geoffrey bent his brows together sternly.

"La Farge," he demanded, "do you know to whom you are talking?"

The man clutched his weapon more tightly.

"You are my prisoner!" he muttered.

"Your prisoner?" echoed Geoffrey. "What do you mean, La Farge? Do you think that you can command *me*—your lord and master?"

"You are at my mercy," cried the other. He was about to add "Fool!" but he did not.

"I am here unarmed," was Geoffrey's calm reply, "and you may stab me, if you like—you may cap the climax of your treason, and murder with your own hand the man you swore to defend with your life. But you cannot ever command me, La Farge; you cannot make me do aught but call you dastard."

There was a silence again, the two figures standing motionless, Geoffrey still expecting death; then as the other did not attack him, he went on, his voice a trifle lower.

"La Farge," he said, "I wonder how you like this triumph of yours? I wonder how your treason seems to you now, when you are face to face with it? You chose to betray

your best friends, and now you have the whole matter in your hands—you have *me;* and you may murder me and ruin all Sarenne, and win power for yourself. You have all that you could have asked for; but I wonder if between God and you, there is not *terror* in your heart?"

Geoffrey saw the man bite his lips savagely; he thought he could read what was in his mind, and he went on.

"La Farge," he demanded, "do you remember some thirty years ago—before I was born and when my father was the young Duke of Sarenne as I am now—do you remember——"

A wild look swept over the other's face, and he clutched his sword more tensely, leaping forward and crying hoarsely, "Stop!"

But Geoffrey paused for an instant only; his face grew sterner yet, and he bent his brows together as he stared into the other's eyes and continued.

"I ask you, do you remember the boy who lived in Sarenne——"

La Farge shouted more fiercely yet, "I say, hold your tongue!"

Geoffrey responded, quick as lightning, "I will not!" and the man leaped at him, aiming a thrust with his weapon. But the sharp point stopped at Geoffrey's breast.

"I will kill you," panted La Farge hoarsely, his face working with emotion. The other only clenched his hands fiercely; he did not give an inch, but drew himself up and returned the man's look of defiance, his whole soul burning in his eyes.

For a full half minute the two men glared in each other's faces; suddenly Geoffrey whispered, "You do not *dare* to kill me, La Farge," and then, seeing a quick tremor upon the fellow's lips, he went on in a low, impressive voice.

"I asked you," he said, "if you remembered the boy who lived in Sarenne thirty years ago,

the tailor's apprentice, who was beaten and kicked and almost killed? And if you remembered that day when the young Duke Geoffrey rode through the streets and heard the cries of the helpless boy. I was not there, La Farge, but you were and you know what happened—how the good duke, who loved every one, sought out the cause of the screams, and set the tailor in the stocks, and took the boy to his own castle, where he might live as a human being.

"Men told me, La Farge, of the joy of the lad; how he fell down upon the ground and wept and cried out, and kissed the duke's foot in his gratitude; and men told me how he served long and faithfully and grew up and became the duke's steward, because the duke trusted him and was his friend. Do you know about all that, La Farge?"

Geoffrey had spoken every word slowly and grimly, phrase by phrase, with his eyes look-

ing defiance at the man before him, and with the point of the sword quivering at his heart.

Twice the other had nerved his arm convulsively, a look of savage determination sweeping over his face, and twice the look had disappeared and the grip relaxed.

When Geoffrey finished, La Farge's sword had sunk lower and there was an expression of fright upon his countenance. Geoffrey saw it and continued more rapidly:

"La Farge," he cried, "in God's name, what was the matter with you—what can you have meant? You owed my father your life; he was your lord and master; you swore to stand by him and his house forever; to count all that you owned his and to defend him with your life! And *this* is your gratitude, this is your manhood!

"You have a sword in your hand, and you think that makes you brave, La Farge. As if that could make you a man, and give you

the right to look into my eyes! I wonder that you can stand there and try to face me, you coward, when you know that I know what you have done and what blackness is in your soul.

"What is the matter with you, I ask you again?—for you stand there and stare at me, when you ought to hide your face with shame, when you ought to fling yourself down on this ground before me and beg me to stamp you with my foot. Are you all dastard and scoundrel, then? Is there no soul in you? Do you not know what it is to have a man's feelings?"

La Farge was still crouching and glaring, desperately gripping his sword; but Geoffrey saw a trembling coming over him, and he rushed on, his voice rising and his whole form seeming to tower higher each moment, as his wrath increased.

"Listen to me, La Farge!" he cried fiercely. "This Raymond came to Sarenne—this black-

hearted murderer—and he killed your lord and your benefactor—the man whom you had fawned upon and pretended to love; the man whose foot you had kissed with tears in your eyes! It was a murder that sent a shudder through the soul of every man in this town; but you, who owed it to your soul to hate Raymond as you hated the fiend himself—what did *you* do?

"You took him your master's secrets and laid yourself at his feet! Oh, God, man, I pity you; I would not have been a hound like that and done a deed like that, for a thousand empires. And as if that were not enough, you plot with him to slay your master's son; and you watch and spy for years and give all your soul to it: and when you find him alone you draw your own sword upon him too! And you stand there trying to force yourself to complete your villainy; trying to kill him with your own hand! What have I ever done to you, La Farge!"

"I did not want to kill you," panted the other.

"You lie!" Geoffrey thundered. "You lie and you know it! You have watched here for years, for just that. Raymond came out there the first night when I was to meet Ducluys; and he came because you had told him of the meeting place."

The man gave a sudden start; drops of perspiration had come upon his forehead.

"You think you can deceive me," went on Geoffrey. "But you sought for my life, and you know it. Are you mad enough to think you will not have to answer for that crime?"

"I did it to save my life!" exclaimed La Farge.

And Geoffrey flung back: "To save your life? Look what you are doing, miserable wretch that you are! All Sarenne is groaning beneath the power of this villain, and there is one chance under heaven for it to

get free; that chance is myself, and you know it.

"If you had succeeded in your plots against me, the last hope of this poor city would have been gone; and the burden of all its wrongs would have rested upon one black-hearted hound!

"I have labored and watched and waited for seven long years, La Farge; and the men of Sarenne have waited, too; the noble-hearted, loyal men, who were ready to give their lives for me and for the cause; and after all our struggling and planning, we were to be trapped by you!

"I tell you again, I wonder at you. I wonder at the madness of you, that you thought you could master my soul with your sword; and I wonder at the impudence of you, that you stand here to give me that reason—to save your life. And the lives of the rest of the men of Sarenne are nothing! The life of your sovereign lord is nothing! The city

must groan and suffer, the men of it tortured and murdered and the women outraged, to save the life of La Farge!

"I don't wonder that you cower, as you stand there. I don't wonder it takes all your might to keep hold of your sword. Look up at me, man, and let me show you what you are.

"You have been a seven years' traitor. Was it always to save your life? Have you never had one chance to escape from Raymond? And what are you doing here now? You stand here and try to lift that sword against me still—is *that* to save your life?

"Fool, you know why it is! It is because Raymond will give you wealth and power. The true men of Sarenne are struggling for freedom and life, and they must be defeated, so that you may have power and wealth! La Farge, I believe it was the God above who put you in this place to-night, to make you heap your crimes upon your own head, to

make you show how black a fiend you are. It is well that you should have to stab your own lord yourself—that you cannot get another to do it for you. Look up at me, traitor, and tell me how you like it!"

Geoffrey's soul had been rising within him at every word; for it set him aflame with rage to think that Sarenne was to be ruined by this man, of all others, and he poured out his words of scorn in thunder tones.

He was a man born to rule and he had never seemed more commanding than now. As he ceased speaking, the other staggered backward, crouching against the wall.

There was half a minute more of silence; then suddenly, with a desperate resolution, the young duke stepped forward, stretching out his hand:

"La Farge," he thundered, "*give me that sword!*"

The man gave a start and a great gulp and clutched the weapon even more tightly,

"LA FARGE, GIVE ME THAT SWORD!"

staring in terror. Geoffrey had bent his eyes upon him, and they shone in the dim light like fire.

"Did you hear me?" he commanded again, more fiercely yet. "The sword!"

The other was panting for breath now, and shaking like a leaf.

"Your grace," he gasped, but Geoffrey only stamped his foot impatiently, coming a step nearer.

"The sword!" he cried a third time. "The sword!"

And then the man broke out with a sudden wild cry, like a terrified animal.

"Mercy!" he panted. "If you will spare my life——"

"You seek to make terms with me?" exclaimed the other. "Terms, and with that sword in your hand? La Farge, are you mad? I am the Duke of Sarenne. I tell you again, give me that weapon!"

La Farge stared an instant more, then

with a moan loosened his knotted fingers and let the blade fall. He sank down, his face upon the ground at Geoffrey's feet, sobbing and panting: "Your grace, forgive me! I surrender."

After that, there was a long silence.

The man was groveling in shame and fear, and Geoffrey stood gazing down at him with folded arms. At last the young duke asked, in a low voice:

"La Farge, do you wish your life still?"

He heard the other pant, "Kill me here!" and stood for a moment more in silence.

"Get up," he said at last; "stand up and talk to me."

The man staggered-to his feet, shaking and sobbing, his head sunk low.

"Give me the sword," said the other, and the man bent and picked it up, and put it in his hand.

Geoffrey sheathed it by his side.

"La Farge," he said quietly, "I cannot

murder any one in cold blood. Would you still like to prove yourself a man?"

"Your grace!" cried the other, gazing up at him wildly. "I——"

"I will not trust a person who has done what you have done," went on Geoffrey calmly. "You will stay by me for the rest of this day. But to-night, when the fighting comes, you may be a man, if you wish, and then I will forget all the rest."

The other sprang forward to take his master's hand and put it to his lips, but Geoffrey, with the single word, "To-night," stepped quickly backward and thrust it behind him. La Farge shrank back with a moan.

Cowed and trembling and not daring to lift his head again, he picked up the lantern, as Geoffrey commanded, and the two went on through the tunnel.

Geoffrey had several questions to ask of his strangely captured prisoner, questions which the man answered in a trembling voice.

It appeared that both Raymond and his son knew of the secret passage, having caused the digging of the entrance to it by which La Farge had come. It led into an unoccupied house, not very far from Ducluys' dwelling.

The whole mystery was now, of course, clear to Geoffrey; he and Gaston had guarded against the spy by watching the usual entrance to the passage, and thus it was that La Farge had not been discovered.

The man told how he had learned of the tunnel long years before by overhearing a conversation of Geoffrey's father.

"Raymond has no idea that I am in Sarenne?" was Geoffrey's next question, and the man answered that he had not.

"And he has not the least suspicion where we mean to attack him?"

"None, your grace," was the answer. "I myself had no idea that you were here."

The two went on in silence after that; they

had almost reached Ducluys' house when La Farge gave a sudden start.

"Your grace," he cried; "I have just thought of it. I know——"

"Know what?" asked Geoffrey.

"How I can prove my loyalty to you!" the man exclaimed.

The other saw that a new light had come into his face, and he asked quickly what he meant. La Farge's response completely astounded him.

CHAPTER XVI

"IT IS GEOFFREY OF SARENNE!"

"I CAN free Victor Ducluys!" was the assertion of La Farge.

"Free Victor Ducluys!" gasped Geoffrey. "What in heaven's name do you mean? Victor is not dead?"

It was the other's turn to start.

"Your grace did not know it!" he cried.

"Know it!" echoed Geoffrey. "Of course not! How could I?"

"But, your grace," protested the other, "Raymond went to Ducluys' house and told him so, and threatened Victor's death."

Geoffrey had been staring at the man in wonder. A sudden cry escaped him then, for, in a flash, the whole truth about the mystery of Ducluys' relations with Raymond was disclosed.

"So *that* was the meaning of Raymond's words which had so startled him. Raymond had given Ducluys inducements enough to keep him quiet!"

In the same breath, Geoffrey saw the ordeal his faithful old friend had gone through in keeping that secret and keeping on with the work of freeing Sarenne.

He saw, too, the meaning of Marguerite's suffering, and like the stab of a knife came the further thought, "I suspected these people of treason!" He forgot all about La Farge.

Leaping wildly forward, he cried out, "Quick, I must see them."

The other followed at his heels as he dashed down the passage, and in a moment more the two were in a room in old Ducluys' house.

The first thing Geoffrey saw was Marguerite, white and worn with anxiety, pacing up and down the floor. She had been alone in the house ever since Geoffrey's wild rush to save his friends from Raymond's surprise.

Now she sprang toward the young duke with a hoarse cry of relief, "You are safe!"

And Geoffrey stood for a moment trembling; then, with a sudden impulse, he went toward her and fell upon his knees. Taking her hand in his, he pressed it to his lips.

"Marguerite," he said softly, "forgive me!"

"Forgive you?" echoed the girl in wonder. "Forgive what?"

"Listen," he went on, the tears coming to his eyes as he thought of what this girl had done. "I do not know how I can ever thank you, ever appreciate highly enough such wonderful loyalty. I have just been told the truth."

The girl stared at him wildly, and then at the strange man in the doorway.

"The truth!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," cried Geoffrey, "the truth about Victor. This man was Raymond's spy."

Then the girl comprehended.

"Your grace," she began; but Geoffrey interrupted her.

"Listen to me, Marguerite," he cried. "I cannot repay this self-sacrifice, but Victor's life shall be saved, if it costs——"

"Stop, stop!" she interposed. "It cannot be! Your grace does not know! It was because father knew that you would risk the cause to save Victor that he would not tell you of this."

"There is no need to risk the cause," exclaimed Geoffrey. "La Farge can save him. We will arrange it all."

The girl stared from one to the other in wild wonder. She stood with her bosom heaving, seeming not quite able to realize the truth.

Then she clasped her hands to her forehead, whispering hoarsely: "Oh, it is too good to be true. You cannot mean it!"

"But it is true," Geoffrey assured her.

"This man desires nothing but to make amends for his fault."

Marguerite asked no questions—she was too much overwhelmed with the sudden relief from the terror that had haunted her.

She began sobbing half hysterically; then, when she became quieter, Geoffrey asked, "Your father has not yet returned?"

Being answered in the negative, he added: "I left him coming here. He must have stopped with his friends."

"Nothing can have happened to him?" asked the girl anxiously.

"I think not," replied the other. "He should be here soon."

The two talked for a while, Geoffrey telling of his rescue of the conspirators and discussing with La Farge the means of saving Victor.

"I do not think that Raymond has left any orders to have him killed, in case of a disturbance," the man said. "I know he does not

look for any trouble, and I think I can rescue his prisoner after the fighting begins."

The three then fell to discussing the matter. They did not notice how the time was passing, until suddenly Marguerite looked at the clock and exclaimed, "Where can father be?"

It was at the very same instant that there came a sound which answered the question, and caused all three of them to leap to their feet in alarm.

They were in one of the upper stories of the house, standing near an open window. Outside, the dawn had begun to break; the street, however, was still dark and silent.

From around the corner had suddenly come the sound of hurrying footsteps, of horses and voices and the clash of weapons. An instant later came a shot.

The three rushed to the window, the girl turning white with fear and gasping, "It must be father!"

The sounds drew nearer, and as they looked they could distinguish the forms of several men coming swiftly down the street and holding at bay, as they ran, three or four horsemen.

The struggle was swift and fierce, and the clash of weapons incessant. Even as the three stared from the window, they heard shouts from the distance, and saw several more horsemen gallop round the corner to join in the affray.

Geoffrey had now become certain that the men on foot must be his friends. Instantly he shouted to La Farge to follow him, and darted down the steps.

The man was at his heels, and in a second more they were at the door, where they were joined by several of the house servants.

They were not a second too soon, for they could hear the combat outside; a moment later came the voice of Ducluys, calling, "Help!"

It took but a second to fling back the bolt and see how things were going.

The three men were still in the middle of the street, fighting for their lives against as many horsemen, while half a dozen more of the latter were in the act of dashing into the fray as Geoffrey leaped out.

The fight that followed was sharp and swift. The horsemen bore down upon those who came from the building, one of them aiming a stroke at Geoffrey's head.

The young duke leaped aside and drove his sword at the man as he passed, landing a savage cut across the shoulder that made him cry out.

Geoffrey heard the voice and recognized it, and it caused him to spring after the fellow like a tiger. It was Prince Armand!

La Farge had been at Geoffrey's side, and had engaged another trooper. The ex-traitor had flung his mantle about his head to disguise himself, but Geoffrey had taken no

such precaution; and a sudden wild yell from one of the horsemen told him that he had been recognized.

Prince Armand shouted to the rest as he heard the magic name, and in one second more the combat had rushed to a center about Duke Geoffrey.

His friends, fortunately, had been as quick as the troopers; two more of the servants had come running out of the house and placed themselves at the young nobleman's side, and old Ducluys was before him, holding Prince Armand at bay.

By this time, the noise of the struggle had roused the street.

There were cries from all directions, and suddenly came a galloping of more horses, drawn by the wild yells—yells of "Geoffrey! It is Geoffrey of Sarenne!"

The situation was one of the greatest peril, and only swift action saved the little group of defenders.

They had been driven back steadily toward the house, and Ducluys, seeing the new arrivals, raised the sudden cry, "Inside for your lives!"

The men turned to obey the order.

There was a passage of swords with two of the troopers who tried to bar them out, and then the party rushed through the doorway.

The assailants were close upon their heels, and, realizing what they were trying to do, drove at them fiercely.

Geoffrey, who was the last of the defenders to retreat, was holding two of them at bay and fighting for his life, when a mantled figure rushed past him — La Farge — and struck down one of the men.

Geoffrey wounded the other, and a second later, before the rest could follow them, he and La Farge leaped backward, and the door of the house had been shut upon the foe.

CHAPTER XVII

"MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS"

THE men were breathless from the struggle, and stared at one another for a moment, half dazed.

But there was no time to lose; already the enemy were battering at the door, and some of them might leap in by the windows at any instant.

Geoffrey glanced swiftly at the party—all were there—Ducluys, and the two gentlemen with whom he had been, and the half dozen house servants, and La Farge, wounded badly in the arm.

The young leader thought first of defending the house, but he saw that that would not do—Raymond would have a thousand troopers about it, if need be, in a few minutes.

There was only one other refuge; and he

turned swiftly and sprang up the steps, exclaiming, "The passage!"

Most of the others did not understand him, but they followed without a word.

Outside, the yells had become a clamor, and the door was creaking beneath battering blows; in a moment more, however, they were at the tunnel passage.

"Your grace," exclaimed Ducluys; "Armand must know of this; he will have his troops at the other end."

"I know it," was the grim response. "Leave that to me."

Geoffrey started the men down the passage, he and Ducluys coming last and escorting Marguerite. They closed the door behind them, shutting out all sounds, and then passed swiftly on.

They had a respite from their wild danger then, but all of them knew that it could be but for a moment.

The sudden calamity that had burst upon

them might well have overwhelmed any one; but every man in the party kept his self-possession, preparing to face the new peril grimly, and bear the worst.

As they went on, Geoffrey's mind was at work with desperate swiftness, seeking the best way of meeting the situation.

The little cavalcade had not gone more than half-way down the black tunnel before, unexpectedly, it came to a sharp halt; Geoffrey went to the front, where he heard excited whispers, and learned that footsteps had been heard in front.

"It was some one running, I am positive," one of the men declared.

Geoffrey stopped and listened, amid a dead silence. He heard nothing then, and whispered, "They must have noticed us, too."

As he thought over the situation, however, it flashed upon him that Armand's men could not have got into the tunnel without one thing

occurring. The instant the thought came, he raised his voice and called, "Gaston!"

The hail was answered by a glad cry, and Geoffrey's faithful friend rushed forward.

"Your grace," he panted breathlessly, "we are surprised!"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "considerably. You mean that Armand's men are at the entrance?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Outside still?"

"Yes."

"Then it will take them a few seconds to open the doors; we have still time. Forward!"

And the little party sprang ahead.

It was only a few steps more; Geoffrey had called La Farge to his side, and it took the man but a second or two to open the new secret entrance.

"Armand thinks we know nothing of this," said Geoffrey, as the men climbed swiftly

through. "It will give us a chance to escape."

This new move let in a flood of light upon the minds of Gaston and Ducluys, and suggested many questions; but there was no time to ask them then.

They found themselves in a damp and back cellar; La Farge closed the door, and led them up a ladder to the ground floor of an old, tumble-down house, with the situation of which they were all familiar.

It was dark there, too, but a faint gray light was coming in at the windows, and upon the street they could hear shouts and galloping horses.

"We have not an instant to lose," said Geoffrey. "Let every one listen to me. I have chosen my plan."

"We cannot bring about the uprising now, your grace," began Ducluys quickly.

"I know it," said Geoffrey. "All of Raymond's men are on the alert, and we could

not get a crowd together. Our one chance is in being able to remain hidden until night."

"Raymond will search every house in Sarenne," exclaimed some one.

"No, he will not," said Geoffrey. "We will fool him!"

He turned and addressed the two gentlemen who had been with Ducluys.

"You have a chance to save me, if you will," he went on. "Raymond's one object is to capture me, and you must deceive him."

The men were eager to know his plan, and Geoffrey continued:

"Take these six men of Ducluys' with you, and make your way to the city walls as swiftly as you can. Fight, if you must; be sure to attack the sentries, as you scale the walls, and cause an uproar that Raymond will surely hear of. I want him to think that I was with you, and that the whole party has escaped from the city."

"Why should you not come, your grace?" asked some one.

"I mean to stand by Sarenne," was the answer. "I think I can manage it. When you get to the forest beyond, scatter and hide until nightfall. Your escape will lend color to the burning of the farmhouses to-night, and so we will be doubly sure to lure Raymond from the city then."

It seemed a desperate risk, but Geoffrey had not told all his plan.

He waited only until the eight had gone according to his bidding, and then he turned to La Farge and said grimly, "*Now* is your chance to redeem yourself, if you will!"

"What is it, your grace?" the man asked eagerly, looking up from the task of bandaging his arm.

"None of Armand's men could have recognized you just now, could they?"

"No, your grace, I am sure of it."

"Then follow those men until they get over

the wall; if they are attacked by Raymond's men, you help in the attack, or pretend to, and make yourself conspicuous; then rush back to Raymond and tell him that we surprised you in the tunnel, and that you fought. Show him your wound. Tell him that we escaped, every man of us, and add in particular that you heard me shouting commands, and heard me say that we had horses outside. That is all; my life is in your hands."

And, like a flash, the man had turned and was gone.

"Your grace, how can you trust him?" demanded Ducluys anxiously.

"He had a chance to kill me and he did not," was the answer. "I do not think that he will turn false again. If he does, it can make the situation no worse, for he can only tell Raymond that I am in the city; and Raymond knows that now."

"But he may lead him here," protested Ducluys.

"He will not find me," was the quick response. "We have not an instant to remain here, for this house will quite certainly be searched anyway, as soon as Armand is sure we are not in the tunnel."

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere at all, except here," replied Geoffrey. "But it would not be best to go to any of our friends, for if Raymond hunts for me, it will be there that he will search. Can you not think of some house like this one—a house that is unoccupied?"

Ducluys bent his brows in thought; the other added quickly: "It must not be far, for every step is a risk; and you must think quickly, for now is our time, while they are searching the tunnel."

The old man spent but a moment more in reflection.

"I know of a place," he said, and led the way to the door.

There was only he and Geoffrey and Gas-

ton left, with Marguerite, but they would have been no safer even had they kept the others with them.

Their only hope while they were in Sarenne was secrecy. Against the forces of Raymond, a dozen would have been as helpless as three.

They left the house by a rear door, which opened into a narrow alley. It was still quite dark, but the men covered their faces as they hurried on, expecting each instant to meet with some of their foes.

They could plainly hear the shouts of Armand's men in the next street, and occasionally the galloping of a horse. They knew that with each instant the excitement must spread and the danger of their detection increase.

Geoffrey and Gaston were helping the girl swiftly forward, and so it took them only a few seconds to reach the end of the alley.

Here they had to cross a street from which they had heard shouting; it seemed to be

deserted just then, however, and they sped across and through another narrow alley, and on to another broad street.

"It is that house there," muttered Ducluys, pointing to one about fifty yards beyond.

"You are sure it is unoccupied?" Geoffrey asked.

"Quite," was the reply; and the fugitives wasted not a moment more.

The street was quiet, and they started down it at a run, keeping in the shadow of the buildings, and listening with all their senses on the alert.

They had gone about half the distance to safety when suddenly Marguerite gave a cry. A sound of horses' hoofs was heard, coming from a street that crossed theirs only a few houses beyond.

The horses were coming nearer with appalling swiftness.

"Quick!" gasped Geoffrey, and dragged the girl hastily on. In a few seconds more

they had reached the door of the house they sought, the hoof beats driving nearer, like an advancing storm.

Geoffrey tried the door; it was locked!

"The window!" panted Ducluys, and started toward it; but the horses were almost at the corner, and Geoffrey drew back and rushed at the door like a charging bull.

It gave way before him; and at the same moment the sound of the horses burst out like the sound of thunder. The riders had turned the corner and were coming toward the house.

There was just time for the four people to spring in through the doorway; they had not even a chance to close the door; they did not know whether they had been heard or seen, and could only stand motionless in the night, trembling, while the cavalcade swept nearer. If their presence was discovered by Raymond's men, nothing could save them.

It must have been the darkness that saved

them. The horsemen rode straight by, and in a second more the danger was past.

Geoffrey drew a long breath of relief, as he silently closed the door, and turned toward his friends, exclaiming, "We are saved!"

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

After that there was nothing to do except to find the safest place in the house to hide, and to wait there through the long, long hours of uncertainty.

They made their way down into the black cellar, where, behind a great pile of casks and boxes, they prepared to spend the coming day. Gaston kept watch by the cellar entrance, but nothing occurred to alarm him.

Geoffrey had faced death cheerfully before; it had been for Sarenne that he had trembled. He could hardly realize that the fearful peril was gone.

The sounds of the excitement decreased little by little, and the city went about its ordinary affairs when daylight arrived. There were no signs of an attempt to hunt for

Geoffrey, and he concluded that he must have succeeded in fooling Raymond once more.

"And we only want to be left alone until to-night!" he muttered to himself again and again.

It seemed at first to the men as if, under the circumstances, they could do nothing but lie there and wait in fear and anxiety, while the hours crawled past. So much depended upon the night that was coming, and there were so many things that might happen meanwhile.

As the day wore on, however, Geoffrey was reminded that he had been in a state of intense nervous excitement all through the night just passed, and was glad to take turns with the others in sleeping away the time. They had nothing to eat, but they had to endure that as best they could.

The hours passed, and darkness fell again without any kind of adventure occurring.

Long before the hour for the struggle arrived, the four anxious people were restlessly calculating the time, and conversing in whispers about the details of the night attack.

They had, of course, no way of telling how things had gone, but it occurred to them that the report might have spread that Geoffrey had escaped from the city, and that the conspirators might, therefore, not assemble.

This would, of course, have to be looked to, and it was finally agreed that some two hours before the time, Gaston and Ducluys should leave by separate ways, and, using every precaution to keep hidden, should seek out the nearest of their friends, and see that word was sent to all.

Geoffrey desired to attempt the same thing also, but the others argued with him so earnestly that he finally consented to remain in his safe concealment until the very hour had arrived.

"Then there will be men enough to defend

you," said Ducluys, "and before that, you have no right to risk your life."

Accordingly, the two men took their departure, and Geoffrey was left alone with Marguerite.

Now that the hour of the combat was almost at hand, Geoffrey's whole soul was afire with impatience, and he could not be still; he was like a bloodhound held in leash. He paced swiftly up and down the dark cellar, savagely clenching his hands.

"It has been seven years!" the girl heard him mutter. "Seven years I have been waiting for this night; and for a chance at him! I have been longing for a fair fight, and have been forced to run and skulk and tremble like some animal! But to-night! At last I may fling my whole soul loose, and go mad in battle with Raymond! Marguerite," he exclaimed once, "we shall win! I do not see how anything can defeat us now! Surely it needs only courage!"

"I shall pray for you with all my soul," the girl answered, her voice quivering. "I wish that I were a man!"

"You are not afraid?" Geoffrey asked, the sudden thought flashing over him that he must leave her here alone.

"There is nothing that can happen to me," was her reply; "it is not for myself that I fear."

Geoffrey stood for a moment regarding the figure in the dim light. Then he bent down upon one knee, and took one of the girl's hands in his, and said in a lower voice, "Marguerite."

She looked up at him, and Geoffrey went on gravely: "I have a very fearful struggle before me, and perhaps I shall not come back from it. Before I go, there is something that I must say to you. It is a fearful time to say it, but fate has ruled it so.

"I have been thinking of your wonderful courage and loyalty. It fills me with wonder,

and I do not know how I can ever sufficiently honor such goodness as yours. But let me tell you——"

"Your grace, we did only our duty, my father and I," the girl put in.

"Perhaps," Geoffrey answered, "but duty is not often done in the world, and especially duty of so very fearful a kind. And it makes me worship you with all my soul. Marguerite, you must let me tell you now—for I may never have another chance—that I love you —I love you with all my heart."

The girl started violently. "Your grace!" she panted.

"Listen," the other went on impetuously. "If I know before I go that you love me, it will be a new inspiration to take with me into the battle; I want to fight not only for myself and for Sarenne, but for you. Marguerite, I love you, and if God gives me the victory to-night, and if you do not refuse me, you shall be my wife, and mistress of all that I have."

Geoffrey felt the violent trembling of the girl's hand in his; she looked at him wildly.

"Your grace," she cried, "I cannot—I do not know—my father——"

The other caught her hands more tightly yet, leaned forward and gazed into her eyes.

"Marguerite," he whispered, "do *you* love me? There is no one else that has anything to do with it—for I am master of Sarenne, and I shall choose my own bride. Look at me, and tell me if you love me, for all my soul is yours."

A deep blush had spread over her face, and her eyes fell before his.

Geoffrey, with a sudden burst of emotion, clasped her in his arms, the girl's head sank upon his shoulder, and as he cried out to her again to answer him, he heard her whisper faintly, "I love you."

There was a moment or so after that during which the two forgot everything in the won-

der of those words; but it was too fearful an hour for joy to last very long.

The girl presently raised her head and whispered in a voice of terror: "God help us, we should not think of love to-night; it is too dreadful."

"I shall not fight the worse because I know I have you to win," was Geoffrey's response.

"I cannot bear to think of your fighting," the girl replied, with a choking sob. "Oh, if this battle were but over!"

So the time sped by, Marguerite now lost in wonder at the thought of Geoffrey's love, and now trembling again at the memory of their situation. There, too, was Victor, and her younger brother Jean, held as a prisoner by Raymond for seven years.

All about them was silence, until at last they heard the cathedral bell tolling the hour of ten.

"And there is just one more," said Geoffrey. "One hour, and the last!"

"You must wait here till the stroke of eleven, as father said," the girl replied; "and when you do start, I pray you to be careful; for if Raymond were to see you——"

"Raymond will not be in Sarenne at that hour," said Geoffrey. "A party of our friends are to set fire to farmhouses outside, you know, and draw him off to attack them."

"And then you will capture the gate?" asked she eagerly.

"We hope so," was the response. "The rest of us are to be ready in waiting, hiding near the castle to begin the attack upon it. We shall have four or five hundred men to start with."

"And is that enough?" asked the girl.

"The city will rise," was the reply. "That is our hope. Think of the glory of it, Marguerite—to be in arms, to have men at your back, and to charge upon Raymond! Think of it! And to sweep him from the streets—to drive him from Sarenne, to crush him, to

kill him! Oh, I want nothing but the battle! And the chance has come! We shall be free to-night, we shall be free!"

Geoffrey had started up, and was pacing swiftly back and forth, his impatience mastering him. He was like a raging lion in his hunger for the fight, and the girl, seeing his mood, spoke no more of her fears—in fact, she even forgot them in her admiration of him.

The rest of the time was passed thus, for Geoffrey could be quieted no more; his whole soul was longing for the hour of action; he was like a drunken man in his battle passion.

Three times the girl had to implore him upon her knees and with her arms flung about him to put back his sword and wait until the hour had sounded; and when at last the first peal of the cathedral bell had struck, he flung up his hands with a cry of savage exultation.

Then he caught the girl in his arms, held her to him, and pressed kiss after kiss upon her burning forehead; after that he turned like a flash, bounded up the stairway, and was gone.

Marguerite sank down upon the ground and lay there shuddering.

Geoffrey, out upon the street, gave one glance about him to see that the coast was clear, then dashed away at the top of his speed.

He thought no more that he was in Raymond's city; the hour for fight was come, and he was on his way! He dashed past the first street crossing—and then suddenly his heart gave a leap. He saw half a dozen figures approaching, and a second later came a loud command, "Halt!"

Geoffrey knew that the word was for him; but he redoubled his speed, flying away like the wind. One glance over his shoulder, and he saw that the others were after him, yelling

furiously: "Stop him! A Raymond! A Raymond!"

And very shortly their cries had the desired effect; the fugitive heard suddenly a thunder of hoofs, and giving another glance over his shoulder, saw two horsemen galloping up at full speed.

The riders had already passed the other men, and Geoffrey looked around to find some place of refuge.

He saw a narrow alley looming at one side, and he made for that; but he was not halfway there when two men darted out and yelled at him to halt.

The fugitive swerved to one side and passed them, speeding on; but in a second or two more the two horsemen were upon him, and he looked behind just in time to see one of them raising his sword for a blow.

Geoffrey's own weapon was in his hand; he dodged and parried the man's savage stroke, and the horse swept by.

The desperate duke then turned to face the second rider, who was only ten yards or so behind; at the same instant, however, a door in one of the houses opened, and a man rushed out to join in the attack.

Geoffrey did not see him, and the man flung his arms about him, pinioning his hands at his side.

Geoffrey was completely taken by surprise, but he gave a fierce wrench and half tore himself loose, the horseman at the same time swerving to avoid knocking the two down.

The effort profited Geoffrey nothing, however, for in another moment a second man had flung himself into the struggle, and then still a third, who wrenched the young duke's sword from his hand.

In a moment more he went down, with the fingers of one of his assailants grasping his throat like a vise.

So they overpowered him and took away his dagger; then suddenly one of them,

glancing into his face, gave a wild yell and bounded to his feet. "By the Lord," he shouted, "it is Geoffrey!"

And Geoffrey knew the voice; he was in the hands of Prince Armand!

CHAPTER XIX

"WHERE IS GEOFFREY?"

IT did not take the men very long to make sure of their prisoner; they half choked him first, and then one of them produced a rope and bound his hands behind his back; afterward they jerked him to his feet to stare at him.

They seemed hardly to realize their good fortune, and as the truth came over them, they shouted and danced about him like wild men in their joy.

"By heaven, who would have thought it!" Armand panted. "It was another lie, and he was in the city after all! And we have him!"

"Your grace, he may have friends," put in one of the others swiftly. "All of these disturbances must have had something to do

with his presence. Had we not best make sure of him?"

"Sure?" laughed Armand. "Kill him?"

"No, but to the castle——"

"Yes, to the castle!" cried the other. "And the duke shall see him! Only think of it, we have Geoffrey—Geoffrey of Sarenne!"

The men turned, and, jerking their prisoner along, started swiftly down the street; they still held their swords drawn, and they kept close about him.

Meanwhile Geoffrey was half dazed; he could not make up his mind that this was real—that he was actually going to Raymond's castle a prisoner.

It had all happened so suddenly—it was like some hideous nightmare. He stared about him wildly, gasping for breath and clenching his fists with rage.

"It cannot be!" he panted to himself again and again. "No, no, it cannot be!"

All his hopes over—his labor for naught? There was to be no fight—and Raymond was to remain master?

The thought choked him with horror, he shrank back from it as from a ghastly fiend, and tore at his bonds till he rent his flesh.

One of the troopers turned and gave him a fierce blow in the face with his gloved hand, and it set Geoffrey's blood surging with fury.

So it was true, after all, for here he was, going on step by step, and there was no one to help him; and there in front was the castle looming up, the lights in its windows twinkling!

The tramp of the men shook his soul; he felt that he would go mad.

So they went on down the street, and each instant the fearful realization burned more deeply into the young duke's soul.

His friends were waiting for him now, and all was ready! The chance of a lifetime was come—and it was going forever!

His friends would wait, and the hour of battle would pass! Or they would attack, and be beaten! Or win, and find their lord a corpse!

There in front was his prison—and then suddenly came a loud sound that fairly shook the ground and made the party halt abruptly.

"They are troops," cried Prince Armand; "what can it mean?"

The sounds died away, and Geoffrey moaned. He knew what it meant!

As if to make him sure, a horseman galloped up from the direction of the castle, and, hearing Armand's hail, halted and cried out: "Geoffrey's friends have made an attack outside; the duke has gone after them!"

"Ah," said Armand. "So?" And then he laughed savagely. "Let them go," he cried, "and good luck to him—*we* have Geoffrey! Forward!"

As they went on they did not pass the house where Geoffrey's friends were to have

assembled—he would have shouted for help if they had, even if it had cost him his life.

The party approached by another street, the young man tugging now and then at his bonds, and being struck for his pains.

He was still trying to realize the actuality of the fearful thing, when the gates of Raymond's palace opened suddenly before him, and he was flung inside!

In the courtyard there was a crowd of soldiers, the whole castle having been roused by the burning of the farmhouses.

The cry was raised that Geoffrey was a prisoner, and in a few seconds, amid the wildest jubilation, the young duke was completely surrounded by a mob of his foes.

Prince Armand stopped to speak to no one, however, but cleared the way roughly through the crowd, and marched on into the palace building and down a long corridor.

Geoffrey knew well where he was going—to the dungeons deep in the heart of the old

place. It was then, for the first time, that he fairly realized the truth that he was lost.

He was marched on, through door after door, leaving the sounds of life farther behind him, and conducted by fully a dozen of Armand's savage troopers, whose spurred boots clanged against the stone floors.

They came at last almost to the entrance to the dungeons; they were very nearly in darkness, for Armand had not stopped for light. There was no chance for the prisoner to escape, however, for two men held him tightly by the arms.

So they went on until they came to a very narrow passage which was entirely dark, except for a faint gleam of light at the other end.

Geoffrey knew that the iron gate to the prison was there in front, and in his despair and horror he was scarcely able to stand.

The passage was only wide enough for one abreast, and so half a dozen men went before the prisoner, and then those who were hold-

ing him pushed him in and followed just behind him, the balance of the crowd bringing up in the rear.

So they went through, striding swiftly and speaking not a word.

They came to the other end of the hallway; there, where the light was burning, was a larger space, the dungeon door in front of it.

Prince Armand, who was ahead, stopped short and turned to see the rest through.

They strode out, one by one, and he counted them up to the sixth; and then the seventh, and the eighth. Armand stared, and then came the ninth, and the tenth, and then two more close together; and that was all.

For one tense instant those astounded men stood and stared at one another; and then suddenly Prince Armand leaped forward with a cry that sounded like the scream of a mountain panther:

"Geoffrey! Where is Geoffrey?"

Geoffrey was gone!

CHAPTER XX

A DUEL TO THE DEATH

GEOFFREY'S method of escape was very simple; it was only because it was so simple that no one had thought of it.

He, of course, knew every turn and corner of the building—knew them, perhaps, better than his captors.

He knew that in the wall of the passage was a little niche or alcove, where a statue had once stood. The thought had not flashed over him until he was just beside that niche, and it was upon the impulse of a single moment that he stepped into it.

There he squeezed himself back against the wall and waited, holding his breath for the three or four fearful seconds that it took the other men to stride past him.

The instant that the last one had gone by,

Geoffrey had glided out and had stolen away without a sound.

It was pitch dark, and his hands were tightly bound, but that was little to him then. He knew that it could be only a few moments before Armand's troopers would be at his heels like wild beasts, and so he ran at full speed, crashing into the wall at every turn of the corridors.

He had not gone fifty yards before he heard Armand's first yell, followed by a chorus that seemed to cause the building to spring into life in an instant.

Geoffrey, however, had meanwhile reached a place where there was light, and was running like a deer.

He knew, of course, that his advantage could last but a few seconds; each turn of the corridors might bring him face to face with one of the servants or the soldiers, and then he would be lost.

After all, his knowledge of the building did

him but little good, for he passed a dozen rooms where he had hoped to hide, but he could not enter because the doors were shut; his hands, tug as he might, would not come free.

He was growing more desperate each instant, for he heard footsteps and yells in front of him.

As he turned down another corridor, he saw a window, and he was ready to fling himself head first out of that sooner than be taken again.

Suddenly, however, he came to an open door, and, like a flash, he sprang inside.

The room was the bedchamber of one of the court attendants. There was a dim light burning in it, and one glance sufficed to show Geoffrey that he was alone.

He closed the door swiftly, but silently, with his foot, and then, like a flash, sprang across the room.

A man could not have had more desperate

need of haste than he just then; outside in the hall he could now hear a babel of voices, and footsteps this way and that.

It was only a question of seconds before some one would be upon him, and the peril fairly made Geoffrey's head reel.

He knew just what to do, however; the walls of the room were all stone, and by the side of the window—there was his chance!

A moment more and he was leaning with his back against it, savagely tearing the ropes against the rough corners of the stone.

He tore his wrists as much as the rope; he tore them until the blood poured down; but he could not stop for that.

Half a dozen swift sawing motions were all that was needed, and then suddenly one length of the rope gave way; only a little more wrenching and struggling, and then, with a gasp of relief beyond all utterance, he tore first one hand, and then the other, loose from his bonds!

And in the same instant he heard outside the swift steps of one of his pursuers.

Geoffrey gave a glance about him—there was a sword upon the wall! He leaped at it, and at the same instant the door was flung open, and Prince Armand rushed in.

The newcomer needed to take only one glance; he gave a hoarse cry of triumph, for he saw Geoffrey just in the act of standing upon the bed and seizing the sword.

A look of demoniac joy spread over Armand's face. He turned to the door again, opening it, and drawing breath to give a shout.

But he did not make the sound that he had intended to; at the same instant he heard Geoffrey's voice, low, but choking with savage intensity:

"Coward that you are, turn round and fight!"

And, like a flash, Armand whirled about; he slammed the door behind him without a

word, and whipping out his sword, flung himself upon Geoffrey like a wild beast.

A more savage combat than the one that followed it would not be possible to imagine.

Armand was aflame with rage, and as for Geoffrey—well, he had only asked for a chance to fight, and, next to Raymond, he would rather have fought this man than any in the world.

There were two of them, each bent upon forcing the fighting, each bent upon driving the other before him; and from the first meeting of the swords, the play of them was like lightning.

They closed in so fiercely that it looked as if they meant to charge upon each other's weapons, and the clashing was like a rattling volley of shots.

From the pace that they set at the beginning, neither of the two drew back for an instant; they meant it to be a fight to the death,

and they meant it to end swiftly. So fierce a struggle could not last very long.

Geoffrey had never had more to fight for; he was in the midst of his foes, and a second more or less might mean his death.

A great rage had been heaping itself up in his heart during his brief captivity, and now, at this sudden wild chance of liberty, every power of his being leaped into blaze.

He was a thousand times himself—eye and brain quick as lightning, and every muscle tense with fierce, nervous energy.

All his soul rose to the occasion; it was now or never with him, and he fought like a man inspired.

Prince Armand possessed tremendous strength, and he was a soldier of a life-time's training; but there had not been thirty seconds of that fierce fencing before he knew that he had met his master now.

Every art that he knew he tried, and tried

in vain; as Geoffrey still drove fiercely at him, inch by inch and step by step, he gave ground.

With each inch the young duke's spirit awoke, and he fought yet faster and harder. Armand's face was blazing with fury; but at every turn he was mastered, and back and still back he retreated!

He was almost against the wall, when suddenly there was a running step in the hallway outside, and the knob of the door turned.

Armand gave a suppressed cry of relief. An instant more and the newcomer had rushed in.

The fighting stopped by consent of both, for Armand leaped away to secure a respite, and Geoffrey sprang back also, with the thought of dashing for the window, knowing that he could not fight two.

But when he saw who it was that had entered, his heart gave a throb of joy.

It was not one of Armand's troopers—it was La Farge!

Armand, too, saw who it was, but he did not know what that meant for him.

"Help me!" he shouted to the man, and then, with a mocking laugh, started once more at Geoffrey.

The young duke had a strange confidence in La Farge after that scene in the tunnel; it had not even occurred to him now that La Farge might have turned again, and he felt no alarm at Armand's move.

The event proved that Geoffrey's trust was well placed, for La Farge sprang forward, and to the consternation of Raymond's son, placed himself at Geoffrey's side.

"Quick!" he cried. "Let us finish him—there is not an instant!"

But Geoffrey was a different man from Armand.

Instead of springing to the attack, he said

quietly to his new ally, "La Farge, go and watch the door."

As the man turned and stared at him he repeated, "Go and watch the door!"

And La Farge obeyed without a word. He rushed over, shot the bolt, and then turned to watch the conflict.

Geoffrey had gripped his sword once more, and pausing only for an instant to study his opponent's face, he leaped at him as fiercely as before.

Geoffrey had read something in Armand's eyes which events speedily brought forth; the bold trooper's courage was quite gone. He gave back step by step now, and his lips were white.

Before a dozen thrusts had been exchanged his coat had been torn twice.

Geoffrey was not surprised at the man's next move. The fellow raised his voice and yelled: "Help! Help for Armand!"

The young duke knew that he had him

now, and he fought so fast that it was only by leaping backward and around the room that the other could save himself.

He was ghastly white, but he still battled for his life, knowing that at any second help might come.

The whole castle was on the alert, and his cry had been heard instantly. It was not half a minute before there were shouts outside, and as Armand called again, a man flung himself against the door so that it creaked.

La Farge, who was helping to hold it, called anxiously to Geoffrey: "It will not stand, your grace; you are flinging away your life!"

But Geoffrey only bit his lips grimly and drove at his opponent the harder.

Hearing several more men outside, and seeing that the door had almost yielded before their assaults, he said quickly:

"La Farge, barricade it!"

And the other obeyed at once. There was

a heavy dressing case at one side of the room, and he hauled it swiftly across. The door was creaking upon its hinges as he rammed the piece of furniture against it.

Next he set to work with a great bed; Prince Armand in the mean time almost stumbling over him in his attempts to avoid Geoffrey's relentless attack.

So the combat went on for another minute, Armand's terror increasing till it was fearful to see. He was kept fighting every instant, but in the mean time he cursed and screamed to the men outside in a frenzy.

The new barriers held fast, however; and Geoffrey only said in a low tone, "La Farge make a rope of the bedding."

The man set to work at the task; it took him about half a minute to complete it, and it seemed as if Geoffrey had timed the fighting by that.

A man may be ever so strong and ever so clever a fencer, but he can only postpone

things when he has lost his nerve. Armand had been wounded twice, saving himself only by his agility; and then, just as La Farge called "Ready," and just as the men outside, having broken the door, were driving back the barriers, he was brought to bay in the corner of the room.

There were a couple of swift passes, the man's eyes starting from his head with the fearful effort of his soul, and then suddenly Geoffrey found the opening he wanted, and drove his sword through his body to the very hilt.

Then the young duke whirled about in a flash and sprang to the window.

"The coast is clear," whispered La Farge. "Quick!"

The improvised ladder had been made fast, and down Geoffrey slid, La Farge following at the very instant the men burst into the room.

They cut the rope, and La Farge fell, but

it was not far enough to hurt him, and he sprang to his feet in a moment.

They were in the castle courtyard then, the high wall in front of them.

The yells from the window had been heard, and several men were rushing toward them; but La Farge turned and ran into the building through a door just in front. Geoffrey followed, and they closed it, darting down a dark corridor.

A trooper appeared before them, but he turned and ran when he saw there were two.

In a few seconds more they had come to a heavy iron door, set in massive stone, a door that they both knew opened out into the street.

Behind them were fierce shouts and swift footsteps, but it took them only a second or two to turn the rusty key, and then there was freedom before them.

Geoffrey sprang out, his heart ringing with joy.

"To the meeting place," his companion muttered swiftly. "I will hide and open this door for you!"

In another moment La Farge had sprung back into the castle, and slammed the barrier behind him.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BATTLE CHANCE

At the point where it had been agreed that the conspirators should assemble, there had been fearful anxiety because of Geoffrey's non-appearance. Most of the men had been hiding near the place since sunset, for Raymond had just posted an order forbidding any one to be abroad after nightfall upon penalty of death.

Ducluys and Gaston had both succeeded in reaching the rendezvous, and had announced that Geoffrey would be there at eleven; but the hour came and went, and the men's hopes sank with each instant.

They heard the alarm given, and heard Raymond ride out; after that those to whom the task had been assigned set out to notify various citizens of the rising.

These returned, and there was still no sign of Geoffrey. Raymond would be back soon, and then all would be lost.

Every man's fear was that their young leader had been captured on the way. It was finally decided that the attack must be begun at all hazards, and the men were about to set forth, when suddenly Geoffrey, bloodstained and breathless, rushed into the house.

His relief as he saw his friends was beyond all utterance; he was safe, safe at last, and the battle chance was his!

For their part, the men would have shouted for joy had he not commanded silence.

There were several hundred of the conspirators assembled; others, including the band of the innkeeper, were known to be hiding near.

Geoffrey told in a few swift words of La Farge's intention, and then silently he gave the word to advance.

The men poured forth from the house, and

set out straight for the castle; no one saw them until they had reached the corner of the wall, by the very door whence Geoffrey had escaped, when suddenly they heard a clashing of swords.

As the foremost of them rounded the corner they perceived that the doorway was crowded with troopers, who were pouring out like a swarm of angry bees, the two or three in front attacking with savage fierceness a single man, who was backing away slowly and fighting step by step.

It was La Farge! With a yell that was the utterance of all their pent-up emotions, the insurgents flung themselves at the troopers.

The struggle that followed lasted only a few seconds, for when Raymond's men saw that they were outnumbered, they turned and strove to get back and shut the gate; they did not succeed, however, for their enemies were close upon them, Geoffrey and La Farge and old Ducluys in the lead.

They forced their way past the entrance, and when at last the troopers turned and fled, the conspirators poured into the palace like a rising tide.

Geoffrey made his way out again for a moment to make sure that all was well.

It was wonderful to see how men had apparently leaped into being everywhere at the first battle-cry; the street was crowded with them, while hurrying down from the opposite direction, bearing ladders to prop against the palace-wall, came Chatrier and his eighty invincibles.

Geoffrey laughed grimly, and then turned to where six horsemen, the faithful Gaston at their head, had suddenly ridden up. He gave them the signal, and they were off with a clatter of hoofs, making the air resound with their cry, "Rise, citizens, for Geoffrey of Sarenne!"

All this had taken Geoffrey but an instant; then he forced his way back into the palace, where his friends had been surging on to

wreak their vengeance upon Raymond's savage mercenaries.

Standing at one side was La Farge and old Ducluys and a dozen others, waiting in fierce impatience for their leader.

Ducluys had chosen these men especially in accordance with Geoffrey's command; they were the men who had lost relatives in Raymond's dungeons, and who might be trusted to give their lives in the attempt at rescue.

There was no need to give a word of command; the whole party set forward like a whirlwind, Geoffrey in the lead.

Once or twice they met men of the palace, but these fled before them; they came at last to the very passage whence Geoffrey had effected his escape, and so to the great iron door.

La Farge had in some way procured a key, and it was the work of but a moment to swing the barrier back.

It disclosed to them a long, dark flight of stairs leading downward; and in the same instant they had heard footsteps and voices below.

It flashed over every man in the company that the sounds must come from soldiers who had set to work to carry out Raymond's behest, and they charged down the steps like very madmen.

There was a faint light beyond, coming through a grated door; they flung this back, and rushed in.

They found themselves in a long corridor, lined with cells having doors of solid iron. The place was lit by a single lamp, in the hands of one of the men of Raymond's court; half a dozen of the troopers were with him, their swords in their hands.

The rescuers charged at them with a yell.

The struggle was swift, for there was no time to lose. Geoffrey struck down the officer before he could draw his sword; he caught

the lantern as it fell, and in the mean time the others had penned the soldiers in a corner, and were making short work of them.

The first shout had produced one awful effect in the dark and noisome hole—muffled cries had come from every side—cries that set the blood of the men boiling.

The last of the soldiers was still fighting when Geoffrey snatched the keys from the hand of the dead officer, and ran to the first of the cells.

There could be no describing the scene that followed; some of the men had been prisoners for years, with never a gleam of light, and with only one hope in the world—that some day Geoffrey might come.

Now, one by one, they rushed out of their dungeons, starved, half-clad creatures, and flung themselves into the arms of some one of the men—a father, or brother, or son.

Poor old Ducluys was trembling so that he could hardly stand. He had lost two sons in

Raymond's jail, and now all his soul was waiting.

They found Victor Ducluys in one of the first cells, none the worse for his short confinement, except that he was weak from a slowly healing wound; his poor old father welcomed him with frantic tears.

Geoffrey, in the mean time, was going on; he had opened all the cells, but there was still left one key. In the floor there was a heavy iron trap door, and upon this could be heard frenzied thumping.

Ducluys gasped, "It may be Jean!" and bent over in terror to help lift the door. It took but a second, and then a figure bounded out with a shrill scream.

An apparition more horrible could not be pictured.

No one could tell the age of the man; he was white and his skin wrinkled and parched; his hair was gray and streaming to his waist; he was naked, except for a single rag, and he

was flinging his long, bony arms about him and shrieking wildly, his eyes gleaming like coals of fire.

Ducluys knew the fearful creature in an instant; it was, in fact, his younger son, Jean. The old man stood still for very horror, for it was evident that the man was a maniac.

He knew none of those about him; he seemed to have but one thought in the world. His hands were clenched in the air, and he cried out in a hoarse and fearful voice: "Raymond! Raymond!"

A moment later he espied a sword lying on the ground where the dead officer had dropped it. The man seized it and bounded away, the rest of the party at his heels.

So they swept back into the palace, and out into the fresh air of heaven.

There they found the fighting still going on; but the building was practically won.

The troopers, of whom there had been several hundred, had made their stand in the

courtyard, fiercely assailed from the doors and windows by Geoffrey's friends and by Chatrier and his men, who leaped from the wall into the midst of them.

Some were still fighting when Geoffrey arrived—there was no thought of quarter, to give or take, with these brutal hirelings of Raymond.

Geoffrey made his way out to the street, where the alarm had spread swiftly. Men were pouring in from every direction, shouting in wild jubilation, and in fierce thirst for battle.

The place was swarming with Geoffrey's friends, and his own heart leaped with triumph. He knew that there was left only one enemy to face, the giant leader himself.

Geoffrey was just about to turn back into the palace to mass his forces together, when he heard a thud of hoofs, and Gaston dashed up on his foaming horse.

"Raymond has taken the gate!" he yelled. "He will be here!"

The cry spread like wildfire; it roused the men in the castle, who had finished their work of exterminating the troopers, and they poured out of the building by doors and windows.

The street was already blocked by the burghers of the town, sword in hand, and the whole party formed in battle-order to wait for Raymond.

They had not long to wait. Suddenly they heard the thundering of his horses, and a savage murmur of eagerness swept through the crowd.

Nearer and nearer he came, the men bracing themselves for the combat; and then suddenly round a corner swept the troops at full tilt, a dense mass of shouting cavalrymen, driving straight into the midst of their enemies.

Then began a scene of the wildest confusion, the two forces meeting and mingling in

deadly struggle, Raymond and Geoffrey face to face.

There was plenty of light to see by, for one of the buildings beside them had been set on fire, and it was by the glare of it that the fearful struggle was waged.

The two parties were both fighting for their lives, and they knew it. They surged now this way and now that, the troopers driving their horses in and cutting right and left, assailed meanwhile from every side; from the windows and roofs of the houses, by men who crept underneath their horses and cut them down.

The soul and center of the fight was Black Raymond himself, a huge figure mounted upon a huge horse, and towering head and shoulders above his men.

He was fighting like a fiend, shouting with his fierce bull voice. His men formed in a dense mass about him, and so flung back charge after charge of their enemies.

Most of these were citizens untrained to fighting, so that the brunt of the attack fell upon Geoffrey and his bodyguard and upon Chatrier and his little band.

Again and again these two rushed against the foe, striving with might and main to penetrate to the heart of it, to reach Raymond himself; and again and again they were flung back.

It was an hour of fearful peril for those who were struggling for Sarenne; Geoffrey fought like a very tiger, cutting his way again and again far into the mass of soldiers.

But it did not profit him, so long as Raymond was still there; in his fearful strength and wild beast courage he was a power equal to a thousand men.

Geoffrey, with a mere handful of his men, flung himself once more at the horsemen with a fierce resolve to stop their advance or die—when something occurred that put an end to the danger in a twinkling.

In the fierce glare of the fire those on the houses suddenly saw a man leap from a window of the castle, out to the castle wall; a man of wild and fearful aspect, with a dagger in his hand.

He darted down on the wall just above the spot where Black Raymond was fighting, and then with a wild scream he leaped out into the air.

Raymond did not see him; the man landed full on him, and the two went down beneath the feet of the horses.

One of the troopers half severed the maniac's head from his body with a swift blow of his sword, but not until the man had driven his dagger into Black Raymond's heart.

A hoarse roar surged up from the crowd, and Geoffrey yelled to charge.

Two minutes afterward, what had been a compact mass of men was a broken and scattered line of fugitives, riding in every direc-

tion to seek escape from the city, and pursued at every turn by the wildly jubilant citizens.

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When the last of Black Raymond's mercenaries had been driven from the city, and the men had time for the utterance of their relief, there was a scene of rejoicing such as no one in Sarenne had ever seen before.

They sought out Ducluys and Victor and Gaston and the grave innkeeper, and bore them about the streets on their shoulders with frantic exultation; they sought for Geoffrey also, the soul and leader of them all, to pay him homage and bear witness to their joy; but it was a long time before they found him.

When at last he appeared, it was with the half-fainting Marguerite in his arms, and he bade them hail her as the mistress of Sarenne.

THE END.